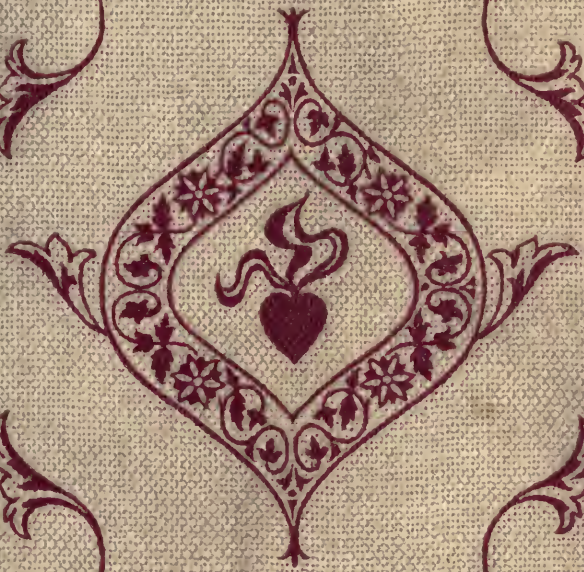
A WEDDING



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A WEDDING

AND

OTHER STORIES

Cruger, Julie Grinnell

By

JULIEN GORDON pseud.

Author of

"Poppæa," "A Diplomat's Diary,"
"A Successful Man," "Vampires"

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A Wedding

SHE used to keep him waiting a half-hour or more. Then she tripped in, stumbling over her gown, a pink, loose thing, drawn in by a silken cord about her hips; her hair piled up a trifle hastily, caught in its blond tortoise-shell comb; stretching her arms; yawning under those white eyelids, a little swollen from sleep.

"Dear me! oh, *deary* me!" she would say to him. "I danced so late,—so late!"

He, in the mean while, had sat at the piano in the blue-and-gold ball-room, fuming, fretting, impatient, with his great patience. The belated servants, always taken unawares, always apologetic, hurrying: "Quick! quick! shut the window! Monsieur will be cold.—Miss will be down in a minute, sir.—Quick!" A maid at the open casement, staring at the street, would turn, in deprecation. The man who made the fires would come in with an armful of chips and papers, blowing on his fingers, tightly grasping his burden. He would kneel at the splendid grate, strike his match, and watch for a moment the blue flame tremble upwards and ascend; then he would shuffle out, on his carpet slippers, returning directly with the huge logs. By and by a warmth would glow, a redolent flame. Some fading

roses filled the apartment with a searching, sad fragrance, and the morning sun of a new day streamed through the looped, rich curtainings, with its promises and its forebodings. Sometimes there had been a dance here the night before. There would be trailed débris of lace or tulle, torn from a girl's floating dress; a flower fallen and crushed from a woman's bosom lying still unswept on the floor's polished surface. The memory of a lost waltz lingered; a lamp half turned out blinked forgotten; drops of wax under the chandeliers; an empty wineglass on the mantel-shelf; a torn glove, hastily left on a chair; a fan, half open, on a window-seat. One could almost imagine one heard soft whisperings,—remnants of merriment, a sigh as of youth.

By and by the butler would appear in the door-way, —correct, pompous, rosy from his ablutions, freshly shaven:

"Miss Nina will be down in a moment, sir. She bid me say, sir, she overslept."

Overslept! He liked the word. She, Aurora! She who might well have touched the lip of Tithonus with benign gift of immortality. Aurora! late and a little weary!

He liked to think about those slumbers: that sweet, fair face on the lace pillow; those girlish hands a little blue and red with cold, their skin a trifle roughened, those hands over which Love had hardly breathed, had never passed,—Love the vampire which sucks the blood away and leaves a pallor.

Once she had written him a note, and she had misspelled a word,—a common, easy word she should have known. Oh, adorable! How dear is a weakness in one we love! So he had said to himself in the wretched

garret he called his home, while he lighted his tallow candle to read her message over and sipped his beer and munched his beef and bread.

He hadn't many scholars. That was why he could afford to wait for them—they dallied with his time cruelly—why he could prolong his lessons long after the hour, taking in each and all of his pupils a profound, conscientious, individual interest.

He was a poor Polish Hebrew. He had a big nose, small dark-blue eyes, and nervous lips. His clothes were shabby, and he wore glasses, and his hair was greasy and thick. He was about thirty years old. He was getting along, but success had been tardy, nay, was not yet here. He was very ugly, poor Grimowsky, but he had a soul of fire. It awoke in his glance sometimes ; it shook his hands when he played. It seized his listeners,—such of them at least as had imagination.

It didn't say much to Nina. Nina hated music. Nina was a very practical young woman. She liked to go to the opera. There, sitting by her handsome mother in the glare of the lights, in her white frock, with a silver butterfly in her hair, she listened pensively —her eyes at least were pensive—to the woes of Tristan and Isolde, or laughed at the great dragon's mouth which hurled its fumes on Siegfried's golden hair. She would whisper behind her fan then to her boy admirers that she "adored Wagner."

But this was so different. This was a task. Mr. Grimowsky was cross because she did not know her lesson. She never knew it. They used to hunt all over and about the piano for the book. It was always lost.

"How can one learn when the book is lost?"

"The scales? Yes," she could play them. Then

she would begin, up and down, up and down, with stiff fingers.

"Exercises? Oh, bother! Yes," she "remembered the old ones."

By and by she would look up and at him:

"To-day, to-day you must play for me. The next time I will do better."

Then in despair he would take her seat, open the new sonata, cantata, barcarolle, say a few words as to its motif, meaning, merit, while she listened with eyes on the ceiling, absently. Then he would begin.

She liked this best because she could sit on the sofa and think her own thoughts. What were they? While his heart beat to the pulsation of the measure, his being vibrated to divine melodies,—for was he not near *her?* —she remembered that Sally Graves was coming to breakfast, and that she must be at her dress-maker's at one o'clock, and that to-night there was the dinner and the ball, and——Oh, heavens! she had forgotten to tell her maid about her gray boots; and she wanted to wear her gray gown. What should she do? what should she do?—for the pink cashmere that rose and fell on that soft, virginal breast hid no mystery and no dream.

So these two sat together for an hour, miles apart. He had never a thought or a desire that could have disturbed her maiden modesty, although he thought of her always, and she thought of him no more than she did of Sally Graves and the dress-maker, those necessary adjuncts of an idle day. The dinner, the ball, were *autre chose.*

Here crept in Vanity, with its flutter. She knew herself to be charming in the gray tulle.

"'Pon my honor," Larry Lathrop had said to her as he took her hand in the cotillon, "you're a stunner in

that gown." And Larry Lathrop knew what he was about: all the women and the girls said that he did. Nina had a large belief in public opinion. She was conservative. It is a safe womanly trait.

One day Grimowsky, punctual to the appointed hour, found an unusual stir and unrest in the house. At her last lesson she had been more than usually indifferent, starting at sounds, with a note in her breast and some lilies in her lap, and the lesson had languished, and he had shaken his head at her, and she had thrown hers back and laughed.

"You look so funny, cross, like that," she had said.

Then he, too, had laughed, but less merrily. There was always a tear drowned somewhere in Grimowsky's laughter. How well I remember his smile, and his shiny *redingote*, and his roll of music!

Well, as I say, one morning there seemed to be something in the air, as the French say. The ball-room, where the grand piano stood, opened on a library, a sumptuous apartment, filled with its wisdom and its luxury. Through the open door Grimowsky heard a sound of voices and saw that there were several persons gathered there,—Nina's father, with his round geniality, and her beautiful, graceful, stately mamma, a little languid, a little worn,—not much,—in the cruel, self-revealing light of morn. Those traces of laughter and of weeping that the years leave, that the day reveals, the kindly night effaces. Often where the world claimed them, Nina and her mother, people turned and asked, "Sisters?" and the older woman's heart would swell with satisfaction. "A little longer," she would think.

To-day the mother was alert, interested, almost eager, while in the father's keen eyes shone a gleam of doubt and of annoyance, and his forehead was puckered as if

with a suggestion of anxiety. This is natural. The mother has her ambition, the father only his love.

There was Mr. Parks, the family solicitor, with his assistant, and another lawyer was there,—a German Hercules with Americanized gutturals, and a heavy voice, and a cold in his head. Every time he blew his nose Nina's father frowned angrily. They were talking audibly, as well-bred persons do, with whom inferiors do not count, and whose motto is that the only prudence is not to be afraid,—a tenet as wise for the drawing-room as for the battle-field.

Nina slipped into the room where Grimowsky sat waiting. "I'll come directly," she said, with a wave of her hand, and then swiftly moved to the library door on tiptoe and listened,—listened with avidity, and with a gleam of curious wonderment. She came back just a little breathless from what she had heard, and then—tum, tum, tum, and tum, tum, tum, and——

"Oh, deary me! oh, *deary* me! I have forgotten all I ever knew!" And her lovely lip quivered with the wearisomeness of it all.

The next time he came, a strange thing had happened. Nina was in the room before him. Yes, in the room, dressed not in the pink gown, but in a walking-costume and a velvet toque, and . . . she was not alone. With her there was a man. Grimowsky looked at him. He was the handsomest male creature he had ever seen. They were sitting together on a stiff Louis Seize sofa in front of the mirror, in which their two heads were reflected,—her brown and his yellow one. He was leaning towards her. The sofa was a very long one, and a couple of yards of its figured tapestries stretched between them. He had his cane and hat across his knees, and was bending forward with an ex-

pression half of admiration and half of amusement on his regular, clear-cut features. She was looking down at the point of her walking-boot, with a shy coquetry furtively suggested in her attitude. He was speaking earnestly, but when Grimowsky came in he stopped.

"Do I disturb you?" said the music-master. He had a harsh voice which only to the ear of sympathy revealed its note of pathos.

The stranger rose, bowed, said a few more words very low over Nina's hand, twirled his golden moustache, murmured, "*A ce soir, mademoiselle,*" and left the room.

As he backed out, not ungracefully, she called out after him,—

"He's got to let you wear your uniform, you know, or I won't be present."

Nina took her lesson in silence. It was in the newspaper the next morning, which he read on the ferry-boat of the foggy, dirty river across which he came daily to his scholars, that Mr. Grimowsky discovered the announcement that the Baron Carl von Staube would shortly wed the fair daughter of Mr. ——. It was further elucidated that the young lady had danced twice with the young gentleman at Hombourg the previous summer, and that she had returned to America and thought of him no more, but that he had remembered and followed her. And then there was a list of the bridemaidens, and that question of utmost import as to whether the young gentleman's Emperor would permit him to wear his uniform at his approaching marriage,—that gorgeous military plumage which he sported on the other side of the water and before which women succumbed. Everything must now be in suspense until this momentous doubt was met.

Well, Grimowsky read, and he went on his way, and he gave his lessons, and he played to his pupils, fervently, despairingly; and he stumbled home and up his garret stairs, where we will not follow him.

When he went to her the last time she said a word to him.

"It is next Thursday," she said,—"next Thursday. And here,—I have brought you a card,"—and she pulled a bit of pasteboard from her belt,—"because, you see, Mr. Grimowsky, I want you to have a good place. Every one is going who takes any interest in me; everybody,—the servants, even. They want to see. There's going to be an immense crush. There will be ten bridesmaids, and they'll wear pink veils, and Car——I mean Baron von Staube will wear his uniform. The Emperor cabled. It was kind of him. It is superb. And now," she continued, "if you will excuse me, I will not take my lesson to-day. Good-by, good-by! Don't forget your bad, bad pupil. You will not, will you?"

He said, "No, I won't forget," and he took the card from her hand. And then something came over him,—a great yearning, a sickness,—and, for the first time in his life, he lifted his eyes and they met hers.

What did she see in their melancholy depths? It must have been something that shook her heart, for even over that thin and flippant nature there blew a faint intuition of pain, of a suffering so terrible, so acute, so hopeless, that she moved uneasily a few steps away from him, her lovely, candid eyes still resting upon his.

"Don't you like . . . to . . . to come?" she said. "I thought . . . I hoped . . ."

"Yes," he said, shortly, "I will come."

She sped across the parquet to the door. When she reached its threshold, some impulse, forever unexplained, forced her back to him. He was standing as she had left him, his arms hanging by his side, the roll of music he had brought grasped in his knotty fingers, and he looked so poor, so forlorn, so lonely, that the girl felt a sudden pity rise and surge in her unawakened heart. She faltered a minute, and then she came to him quickly.

"Say good-by to me, monsieur," she said, gently. "Take my hand."

He took it in his own, and then his face was convulsed with an expression which she had never seen before on any countenance. The sunken eyes grew sombre, the lips contracted, and the lines deepened on those thin, pale cheeks.

Did Nina understand? Who shall say? She was a woman. In a moment he had dropped her hand and she was gone.

It was a brave affair. So said the tiptoeing crowd,—the smart ladies in their dainty finery, the ushers in their frock-coats, with their gardenia flowers, my lady's maid in the gallery and my gentleman's valet on the stairs. And he, handsome Titan, wore the uniform, with its epaulettes, its sword, and its casque.

His own feelings were mingled. He was bored to death, and at the same time relieved. She was a dear little thing, and pretty; and it was so much better to be married in America, where Méline could not come and make a fuss, mayhap forbid the banns or disturb the ceremony. By the time they went back she would have made up her mind. She had always been unreasonable and violent. He was well out of that. And,

then, this income. God! what a comfort, to be able to settle his debts at last, snub his creditors, hold up his head at the club, and put a new roof on his leaky paternal domain! So, on the whole, he was well pleased. And then there was the moral side. His parents were enchanted. This gave him agreeable titillations of virtue. They hadn't liked Méline. Ah, yes, the moral. Morality was always excellent.

Who Méline was is not our business. She does not belong to this narrative. Stern moralists will probably consider it fortunate.

At three o'clock the young couple, deluged with rice and slippers and flowers, pelted, tormented, kissed, and wept over, waved their last wave through the carriage window, James and Thomas shivering on the box, in their furs, with an anomaly of white violets and ribbons on their breasts. They started on that long journey to which the priest had said to them that the grave alone should cry, "Halt!"

But its first resting-place was nigh. They were less than an hour in the train, and then a short drive brought them to a secluded bower, the country home of a near relative, where the honeymoon was to be enjoyed.

There are various opinions as to the pleasures of a honeymoon. There exist cynics who say, "*Peut-être.*"

Everything here, however, looked very fair. The bride so charming in her taut travelling-apparel, the groom only a little less handsome and valiant in his elegant, Astrakan-lined and -collared coat, than he had been at the altar. His polished nails glinted as he pulled off his driving-gloves to help his young wife alight from the platform of the train. People looked out at them and said, "They are beautiful."

A maid, sent on before in an earlier train, met her mistress with the other servants at the house door, and the young woman asked permission to ascend for a moment to the room allotted her before she should join her new master for a ramble in the grounds. The dinner would not be served for several hours; there was plenty of time for her to rest, to take breath after this wonderful day.

He gallantly raised her fingers to his lips, lingered a moment, lighted a cigarette, and they parted for the first time since they had been made one.

"Miss Nina,—I beg your pardon,—madam," said the English maid, blushing, "I have got something to give you that a messenger-man brought to-day. He gave it to me, miss—madam, and he said no one must have it but you, and you must have it before evening."

She fumbled in the open mouth of a leather golden-monogrammed travelling-bag, and brought forth a small parcel. It was wrapped in a clean white paper and tied with a piece of string. It was directed to Baroness von Staube, and Nina read her new name with pride and some excitement. "How pretty!" she thought. "I am a married woman. How funny! I like it, though. But what can this be?"

Somewhat dazed and fatigued from the morning's agitation, she dismissed her maid, saying she wished to be alone and would rest by the window a half-hour. She took off her hat and sank in a low arm-chair. In the grate burned a bright fire.

And, because she had nothing better to do, she began to untie the parcel indolently. It was a collection of papers of various sizes on which a cramped hand had traced many words. The first thing that she read was this poem:

C'est l'ange envolé que je pleure,
Qui m'éveillait en me baisant
Dans des songes éclos à l'heure
De l'étoile et du ver luisant.

Toi, qui fus un si doux mystère,
Fantôme triste et gracieux,
Pourquoi venais-tu sur la terre
Comme les anges sont aux cieux?

Pourquoi, dans ces plaisirs sans nombre,
Oublis du terrestre séjour,
Ombre rêveuse, aimai-je une ombre
Infidèle à l'aube du jour?

She read at first curiously, then interested, and at last ardently with parted lips and heaving bosom. These are some of the words she read. They were all in French, but we will give them here as best we can in her own tongue :

" Those bitter-sweet grapes, thy lips, hang just above me. I would not touch them if I could. It is enough for me to divine the savor of thy breath, the red that lies on the corner of thy mouth. Thy mouth ! Sweet harmony, sweet wild flower, ripened for heaven's kiss. Thy image floats before me like the mirage in a desert land of silent woods and sleeping waters. Why hide thyself in mists? I know thee all. When thou sleepest I wake.

" I tremble drinking bitter delights. Oh, what agony grasps my soul !

" Thy beauty is like the sound of the hours at night stepping softly, softly, masked in shadows. Let its cadences lull thee to enchanted shores. Oh, cruel, cruel, soulless child ! Will thy heart forever sleep? Have the gods no pity for tired things, that they so

wring my heart while thou art sleeping like an infant in its mother's arms?

"I was trembling, dazzled, but you saw it not. I cannot read your thoughts; I am too dull, too old. But, though I may be old with want and poverty and despair, near you, mademoiselle, I have sometimes felt like a god; for the hunger to possess is animal, but the thirst to be possessed is godlike. And this is all I ask, that you should possess me. What madness to have loved you so if I could not even know your thought! This evening I am thinking of thy laughter, shaken from roses. How gay and joyous a thing it rings! It fills my poor room. Sometimes thy eyes are sad—— or do I only fancy this! Oh, beautiful eyes and soft laughter, that come to me in my dreams!

"I played to you, and you listened. When I had finished, mademoiselle, you said, 'Ah! that is nice,'— and I had given you my soul. Was that kind? Could you find no better word? none? That was a cold word. I know you are only a child—pardon! Do I really love you? Ask the tides, the winds, the waves, the storms. I cannot answer you; for I am lost. How weary the saved must be in that heaven where thou art not, my beloved! Oh, Nina, Nina! I fear thy footstep, I fear thy hand, which I seek in the darkness. I listen for thy voice which calls me. I have no courage. Thy breath burns my cheek. It is not Death. It is all-conquering love. But I would not harm or touch thee, dear. I would not dare—no, not a touch. Only a sigh, a thought. Why do I live, Nina?—I, ugly worm, and thou so beautiful and fresh. Oh, thy beauty!" . . .

And thus on more and more she read and she read, this new Eve whom the serpent had found idling under

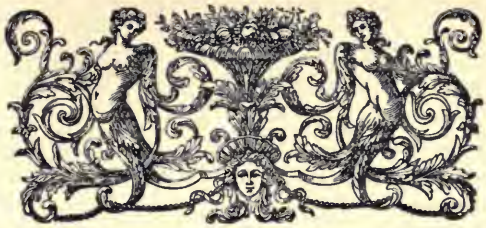
her boughs. And then there was a brisk step, and a whistle, and a hand upon the door-knob.

"Well, my little birdling," he said, opening the door with a vanquishing gesture half impatient and half amused,—"well, *I* wait."

But to Nina an unknown tongue had spoken. It had spoken. She had listened. She thought it sweet. For the first time she had been touched by the hidden springs of passion. Her cheeks were aflame.

She thrust the papers into her bosom, turning angrily at this disturbance. Who was this who dared invade her privacy?

Her young husband came forward into the room. She looked up: she had forgotten him.



The First Flight

I.

MRS. HIGHTY TIGHTY rested from her labors. She thought that they were "very good." She took a long breath and looked about her. Her real name was Mrs. Hyatt Titus, but her husband's cousin, Mrs. Hatch, who was humorous, had given her the *sobriquet.* She had been assiduously occupied for eighteen long years in bringing up Miss Hyatt Titus, and now the rest was to come and the recompense. Miss Hyatt Titus, or rather Miss Highty Tighty, was "brought up." The birdling was fledged. The first flight imminent. She was a graceful and pretty girl with soft eyes and a fresh complexion. She played on the piano and the zither to such audiences as had the fortitude to listen. She drew noses and ears in crayon every Saturday with a drawing-master. She spoke French—such French as it was—she even managed a little German—with her governess and a dictionary. Strangers knew nothing of this crutch ; but her cousins the Hatches, those inconvenient cousins, knew it ; and the German baron who accosted her in his own tongue, having heard she was a polyglot, when he came up to the Club on the lake, had been forced to suspect that

she had not understood a word he had said to her. It did not matter, because she was really pretty, and had a knack of putting up her hair becomingly. But she had herself been profoundly mortified. It had remained one of the stinging memories of her youth.

The Highty Tightys were well off, and had only this one little duckling. They lived on a lake where the duckling had bathed and rowed and swum ever since her babyhood. It was shallow, and when she grew tired or frightened, if the tide was low, she could stand up in the water and wade to the shore. It was a salt-water lake which was fed by a creek from the open sea. It was the same with her boating. There were no breakers, no surprises. It was all very safe and easy. The first steps of life are made easy for the young.

Miss Highty Tighty rode a quiet little cob twenty years old that had the gait of a rocking-chair. Nevertheless her neighbors felt called upon to declare, particularly such as were under obligations to her parents, that she was a bold and accomplished horsewoman; and, in fact, her figure did look well swaying against a sunset sky. Once she mounted a prancing steed to whose crupper one of the club men had swung her. The horse kicked; she fell on her face and scraped her shapely nose. This was another memory which haunted her with unpleasant persistence. The young man only thought it was a pity about her nose. Such discomfitures are of little importance to others, and only weigh on us when we are very young. They appear cheap to the callousness and effrontery of middle age.

Besides the house of Highty Tighty, which was well ventilated, salubrious, large, extremely clean, and wherein hung a few fine pictures purchased abroad by Mr. Titus, and some comfortable though not very

artistic furniture purchased by his wife, there were two other habitations on the lake,—the house of Hatch, and the Club.

The Hatches were second-cousins of the Hyatt Tituses, and not well off. It is difficult to be well off when one has nine children. There were eight Misses Hatch, of whom the eldest was twenty-two; the youngest-hatched of all, the son, was seven years old. He was a dirty, freckled-faced little boy, who passed his entire life in the lake and came out of it dirtier at evening than when he went in. He used to be hastily wiped off by a sister or two for a half-hour's dress-parade before supper and his final nightly disappearance. The rest of the day his family kept him at arm's length; he was always too wet to approach feminine front-breadths. Mrs. Hatch had been a beauty and a wit. She was no longer a beauty, except, indeed, in the estimation of her husband, who thought her still much handsomer than any of her daughters; but her wit had remained, and that certain Creole charm of a rich, languid nature which Emerson says everybody loves.

When Miss Hyatt Titus was expected there had been a great upheaval, and Mrs. Hatch had been immensely entertained. No royal infant's advent could have been heralded by a keener anguish of expectant prophecy. There was an early array of physicians on hand, and of anxious exclamatory nurses. There were baskets, blankets, sweet-smelling flannels, muslins, laces, ribbons, and powder-boxes, five cribs at least, and seven rattles. The godparents and a clergyman had been already secured for the christening. If Mr. Hyatt Titus so much as looked in at the nursery door he was dragged out by an array of unknown females who in-

vaded his house and tramped about it for months beforehand. When the great day came it was met exactly as it should have been. The baby arrived at its appointed hour, and everything was ready and had been ready a thousand times over.

Mrs. Titus had married somewhat late, when marriage comes to be looked upon by a woman as a blessing, not as a mere accident of fortune. She was just beginning to be worried. She had been well brought up ; she believed that motherhood and wifehood were a woman's province and sphere. She had not married in her first youth, I say, and therefore, as is the case with spinsters of a certain maturity, looked upon matrimony as a career, not as an estate. We view with peculiar solemnity what has not happened to us.

Mrs. Hatch, on the contrary, had danced up to the altar at seventeen, without much thought or care on the subject ; simply pleased to have a handsome fellow by her side and her first train two yards long at her heels. When the first little Hatch came it was entirely unexpected, and nothing was prepared. It was pinned, however, into one of its mother's flannel petticoats, and passed its first night on a book-case, propped up by "The Descent of Man." It rolled off the book-case in the morning, and was then picked up and put away more safely in an arm-chair until a suitable receptacle could be contrived.

The rapidly-sequent little Hatches of course inherited the lately-provided layette of number one, which remained conveniently at hand, and, it must be confessed, was in constant use for the first fifteeen years of Mrs. Hatch's married existence. But Mrs. Hatch herself felt about as much the importance and responsibility of motherhood as did the pretty pink-and-white lady

rabbit which reared its offspring under the garden wall. The family grew and flourished notwithstanding, and though the children were not brought up like their little cousin across the lake, they managed somehow to tumble up and survive. The girls were all good-looking, and some of them were very beautiful. They were all bright, and some of them were clever; and the boy Crummy—his name was Cecil Cuthbert Crumbar Cadwalader—was the idol of the house of Hatch, and declared by each and all of his sisters to be possessed of incipient genius. His mother had fewer illusions about him. She was one of those delightful persons who are inclined to think their swans are geese, and to laugh at them.

Mr. Hatch *père* was considered a brilliant man. He was something of a poet, an artist, and a philosopher. He was, moreover, uncommonly handsome; had large, dreamful eyes, distinguished manners, and an elegant address; a man of parts, a man of thought, an accomplished gentleman, a charming conversationalist. He had ornamented his own mind. In so far he was a success. But . . . he had never been able to earn any money. His talents, such as they were, remained fallow and unproductive in the ducat line, so that everybody shook their heads and said that he was a failure. Fortunately, he and his wife each had a small income to depend upon, else they and the nine little Hatches would undoubtedly have starved. He had been minister abroad, and had once been in Congress, but these things had led to nothing in particular, and the only book of poems he had published had had a literary but no general success. His cousin, Mr. Hyatt Titus, on the other hand, who had religiously abstained from politics, diplomacy, and literature, and who was short and plain

and somewhat taciturn, had amassed a large fortune. He had not been to college, and at school had been called a dunce; but he was in reality very able. As he grew to man's estate he even became well-informed. When he built himself a house he taught himself the sizes and uses of girders, rafters, and supports, the quality of brick, the density of mortar. When he settled in the country he studied farming, and to some available purpose. The varieties of soils were his delight; fertilizers filled his horizons. When he turned his mind to poultry his prowess was extraordinary. His fat pullets took first prizes at all the county fairs. He had a turn for natural history, and studied the legs and horns of caterpillars for recreation, instead of writing roundelays like the dreamy poet across the water who knew everything except the useful. Mr. Hyatt Titus entertained a secret contempt for his cousin Mr. Hatch, although he admitted he was an agreeable fellow to meet. But Mr. Hatch looked upon Mr. Hyatt Titus as upon a bundle of wisdom, secretly deploring what he called his own "limitations."

The Hatches' house was situated on the very edge of the lake, and their tiny sail-boat was moored at the front door. There was another entrance, of course, at the back, where carriages could drive up. On summer afternoons there generally hung a Miss Hatch out of every window, drying her hair after the salt bath. They had hair of every imaginable length and color. When visitors came the little ones and the older ones cried out "Halloo!" and parleyed hospitably with the incoming guests. The middle ones, such as ranged from twelve to sixteen, were shy, and drew in their heads, giggling.

Mrs. Hyatt Titus deprecated this deplorable lack of dignity. She always called Mrs. Hatch "Poor Mary,"

but why, it would have been difficult to say, for poor Mary was quite contented with her eight harum-scarum girls, her little Crummy, and her poet husband, impracticable as he might be. Mr. Hatch's affairs being always in an unsatisfactory condition, he had plenty of time to devote to his daughters, and he took a deep interest in their education. They studied the classics with him. He taught them the languages, in which he was an adept, and he liked to see them dance and to hear them sing. They were very well educated young women, not having been repressed by the narrow influence of governesses and tutors. Two or three of them were excellent musicians. But it was all a matter of course ; there was no to-do about it. Where there are so many there is no time for self-glorification, and all these merits grow indistinct in the general struggle for life. Miss Highty Tighty's feeble accomplishments were *autre chose.*

Mr. Hatch's house was old and rather shabby in the matter of paint and of modern improvements, but picturesque and pleasant enough ; it was not in very good repair or order, yet not altogether untidy. The library was cheery and commodious, and filled with clever and serious books, and it was always swept and dusted . . . once a week. The piazza was vine-covered and delightfully cool. Here Master Wace, the cat, and Layamon, the dog, with his wife Berenice, sunned themselves half the day beneath the cyclamens ; here the old pet bird, Genseric, who had the asthma, swung in his cage and sang a husky ditty ; and here Mrs. Hatch lay in the hammock with a bit of white lace on her auburn hair, reading. She read very wise books, and she had wise and amusing things to say of them at dinner to her husband. And the children climbed the trees or rested

in their shadows, sailed the boat, swam, dived, ate jelly-cake, and devoured unripe fruit; had eight little stomach-aches and nine little colds, as the case might be, and their mother smiled and said, "Dear me!" and was placid and adored. Over in the big house across the water Mrs. Hyatt Titus was out of breath at all moments, and all worn out every day running after and dressing and combing and purring over her one little duck that she thought the most marvellous of snow-white swans.

I have said there was another house on the lake, and this was the Club. It was a hideous white structure with green shutters, hoisted up on high foundations upon a white stretch of sand. It was surrounded by slender pine-trees. It had a flat roof, and no piazzas, and only a wooden *porte-cochère* under which carriages drove. Some young men of fashion had a lien on the creek, where they played at fishing in the autumn, and they imagined that there was good shooting in the woods in the neighborhood. The fishing and shooting were, in fact, indifferent, but it was a nice place for a "day off." There was fine sailing on the Sound, and plenty of good wine in the cellar. All through the summer parties of these gentlemen came up and down and had a nice time of it eating, drinking, and making merry with cards, truffles, and champagne. And they walked, and rode, and pulled their boats, and sometimes managed to catch a glimpse of the Misses Hatch hanging out between their window-shutters. Such as were acquaintances were invited to come in. Tea would be improvised under the maples, and what mattered an earwig or two in the cream where there were such a lot of jolly girls? Even the mother and father were entertaining. *Sans gêne* was the motto, and that is what

men like best. It is probably the secret of most mésalliances.

There was another abode near the lake, but not upon it. About a quarter of a mile away there lived a young orphan millionaire with his two maiden aunts. He had been a rather weak child, and so had not been sent to college. His mind, which was not over-brilliant, was, therefore, not very well stored with knowledge. But he had good horses and rode them pluckily, and he could sail a boat, and was a pretty youth. He was considered a desirable match by the mammas of the neighborhood. Once Mrs. Hyatt Titus—only once—had whispered to her spouse in the curtained sanctities of the nuptial chamber that if Providence should so arrange it—if the young people should fancy each other, perhaps, nay, who knew? stranger things had happened. Their Violet was very lovely. Willie Truden had probably remarked it.

Mr. Hyatt Titus took little interest in such matters; American fathers rarely do. But if his daughter were to leave him at all I suppose he thought that Willie and his millions might suffice.

That very day Violet Hyatt Titus and Mr. Truden had sat for an hour together on the sea wall, and it had entered into this demure maiden's breast to wonder if he would "do." She had a keen appreciation of the value of money. Her mother would have called it a love of the beautiful. She also had a keen appreciation of the pleasure of ruling others, and Willie could easily, she decided, be ground to powder and taught to obey. She talked to him all the time about herself and her projects and desires, and he listened with his legs hanging over the crumbling stones, now and then killing a mosquito that lit on his nose.

"Can you not stop to dine?" asked the maiden.

"No," said Mr. Truden: "I promised to pass the evening at the Hatches'."

A look of deep commiseration passed over the girl's sweet face.

"They invited me," she said, "but really mamma never liked me to associate with them much when I was little, and now, as you can imagine, they are very . . . er . . . uncongenial."

"They're fun," said Willie, laconically.

His companion turned and looked at him. "And who would wish to be fun?" said she.

"Well, I don't know," said Willie.

She turned and looked at him, as I say, and wondered for a moment if he might prove testy after all. Would he be uneasy under the crushing and mangling and ordering about to which her papa and mamma submitted? If there was anything she disliked, it was obstacular people. She expected everybody to agree with her.

"Of course I feel for the poor things," she sighed. "I'm sure I don't know what's going to become of them."

She had often heard her mother make this remark with a wagging head.

"They seem to be going along," said Willie.

As he crossed the lawn the lady of the manor darted out at him from a lilac-bush. "Stay and dine," she said, affably.

"Awfully sorry—can't," said Willie.

Mr. Highty Tighty was hunting caterpillars in the trees. When not in town pinned to his desk he devoted himself to this pastime. He looked up and repeated his wife's invitation with more cordiality than usual.

He preferred caterpillars to young men, not being of a genial nature. But Willie was the son of an old friend, and as such might be tolerated.

Willie, however, trudged off firmly, declining.

"She's got jolly eyes," he said to himself. "It's a pity she's so infernally . . ." But he did not conclude the sentence.

II.

THE Hatch sail-boat, which was called the "Lakshmi," and was painted dark blue, being the presupposed color of this goddess of beauty, grace, riches, and pleasure, came bowling across the lake in the penumbra of a gray twilight. She made an odd seething sound as she swung through the high grasses or rocked and wavered with her keel half caught amid the floating water-lichens. The lake was still and smooth as a cloth of gray satin upon which one might have skated; here and there a pale rose shading on a white and green reflection. There was something undecided about the evening. Its sigh seemed to portend a change for the weary, to hold a whisper of impending tumult, possibly of awakening storm, for the restless. Who knew? perhaps after all the cloud would scatter and pass to welcome the rising of a shimmering moon.

The sand beaches, hyaline, crystalline, lay mysterious in the dumb gloaming, with glintings here and there as of emeralds. Now and then a sharp gust brushed a wave which rose and trembled upward in a brisk swelling, its dark back and foaming mouth resembling some feline creature at bay. Across the sands, far, far away, gleamed the pale, phosphorescent stretches of an anxious sea.

It had showered earlier, and the woods had been

half drowned in the violent summer flood. The trees were still bent under the weight of their wetting, and sent out fine, keen odors of resin and maple juices, which mingled with the nearer pungent smells of the marine algæ.

Across the sleepy waters breathed suddenly that essence of quivering life, that instinct of vitality, which was sure to agitate anything and everything possessed by a member of the Hatch family. The Lakshmi flew to meet the advancing night, catching each flaw and puff, Muriel at the tiller, Audrey at the mainsheet, and a very big fish in the bottom of the boat.

"Halloo? look out for your heads," cried Audrey.

"Ready about! Port your helm," called out Muriel, and whack! went the low flying boom, grazing the forehead of the frightened fish.

It was indeed a very big fish these young girls had captured that afternoon, as well as a much frightened one. He lay now on his stomach in the bottom of the cockpit, wallowing, with one eye on the horizon and one broad hand on the side of the tiny craft. His name was Victor Arthur Lucan Humphrey George Draco, Earl of Brownlow. He was stopping at the club-house with some American fellows whom he had met the year before while elephant-hunting in India, and he had gone over with them to call and be duly presented to the Hatches that afternoon. The others had walked or ridden home, and the girls had volunteered to sail him back as far as the club-house door.

He was young and big and red. He was also extremely shy. He had immense hands and yet larger feet. His mouth was always open, displaying his front teeth and a part of his gums. His teeth were extremely clean, and his gums were fresh and healthy. He had

a heavy jowl, a drooping eye, and a gentle, affectionate disposition.

The Misses Hatch had been caught as usual by their visitors just ascending from their bath. They were arrayed in rather tumbled cotton gowns, while their locks escaped in little damp rings about their foreheads and ears from under their blue Tam o' Shanters.

Muriel was a lovely brown creature with blue eyes. Her hands and throat were tanned. Audrey was less beautiful, fairer, and extremely graceful. She looked "chic" even in her night-gown—or at least this was the family tradition.

"I say," said the earl, "that's a nasty wind."

"Aren't you in the habit of boating?" asked Audrey, letting out the mainsheet.

"Not in anything so little," said the earl. "My father owned the Vanquisher. She's under repairs now, but I'll have her on the Mediterranean next spring."

"She's like an ocean steamer, isn't she?" said Muriel. "Don't come up, please. We're going to jibe."

The earl, with a moan, prostrated himself again, and lay quite still.

"Aren't we nearly there?" he asked after a while.

"You see," said Audrey, "the wind's skittish. I think it is dying out. If it does we'll just run you in at the light-house, and Jim, the keeper, 'll row you ashore?"

"What will *you* do?" asked the young Englishman, turning over suddenly on his back.

"Oh, we'll swim back," said Muriel, a little contemptuously. "We're used to the lake.—Ready about, Audrey, and don't be such a poke."

As they neared the light-house, a solemn stone struc-

ture which loomed up on the borders of the sand-spit, a boat darted from under its flight of steps, and in the boat sat Miss Highty Tighty, charmingly attired in pallid gauze with puffed sleeves, and an æsthetic hat poised upon her head, a gold girdle about her hips, the oars in her hands, and an open book upon her lap.

She had timed the whole thing admirably. She had seen the Lakshmi and its occupants from afar. She had seen the big fish in one of his frenzied leaps from side to side, and, recognizing that it was a male fish, had concluded that it was worth angling for. She had not yet entirely decided that Willie Truden would "do," and in the mean while . . .

"What a darling girl!" said the earl, with one eye to leeward. "Introduce me!"

The Hatch ladies looked at each other and smiled significantly.

"Why, certainly," they said.

"She's reading. She doesn't see us," said the simple, *naïf* Briton, much interested.

Muriel and Audrey again exchanged masonic glances, but said nothing. The Lakshmi veered and grazed the reader's light bows.

"Oh! how *do* you do, *mes chères cousines?*" And Miss Highty Tighty looked up duly astonished.

"Thanks. We can just sit up and take a little nourishment," said Muriel.

"Let me introduce the Earl of Brownlow," said Audrey, majestically, settling her Tam o' Shanter with one hand and clutching the rope with the other. She let the wind spill out of the sail, so that the boats lay lazily swinging in the tide swell side by side.

Miss H. T. pouted with haughty unconcern, but condescendingly kept close to her cousin's prow.

"Look here," said Audrey. "Couldn't *you* row him ashore?" and she indicated their captive with a knot of the mainsheet held in her hand. "It's only a quarter of a mile, and we're stuck. I'm going to get Jim to give us a tow."

Miss Highty Tighty's heart leaped for joy. Her life had been a pretty dull one so far. But she only said,—

"Oh, but is it permissible?"

"All right," said Audrey, shortly. "Jim can take us all, then."

"I say," said the earl, "do row me home, now, won't you?"

"If you insist," said Miss Highty Tighty, "I am defenceless."

So the big male fish was deposited within a few feet of the fair oarswoman.

"What book are you perusing, *ma cousine?*" called Muriel saucily after them, imitating her cousin's accent. But the answer was swallowed on a recurring wave.

"Why do you ask her?" said her sister, laughing. "Shall you read it too?"

"No; I want to avoid it."

"Shan't I pull you?" said the earl.

"Oh, no; I prefer to manage my boat myself," answered his fair captain, whose life-principle was here enunciated.

"You were reading," said the earl, with timidity, very red with the exertion of the transfer.

"I live in my books," said Miss Violet.

"Dear me!" said the earl. He picked up the volume, which proved to be the correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson.

"Which of the two men—writers, I mean—do you

prefer?" asked Miss Highty Tighty, taking long but very slow strokes : she had herself not read a line of the letters.

Not knowing exactly what reply to make, the earl screwed up his lips, fanned himself with the fluttering book, and contented himself with—

"He was a queer duffer."

"Duffer?"

"Yes. Isn't that good English?" asked the earl.

"It may be," said Miss H. T., "but the expression is hardly adequate."

"Oh! I say," said the earl, "you're trying to get a rise on me."

Miss Hyatt Titus opened her eyes widely. The earl, like Willie Truden, thought them rather nice.

"But which do you consider to be the . . . er . . . duffer?" she inquired, with an arched eyebrow.

"Oh, Carlyle, of course. I don't know much about the other fellow. Who was he, anyhow?"

"What! You never read any of Emerson's essays and poems?" cried Miss Hyatt Titus. "Why, where *have* you lived?"

"At our place in Devon most of the year," said the earl, humbly, "or in London when I run up, except at deer-stalking, you know, when we go north."

"And you never heard of Emerson?"

"Oh, I may have heard his name," said the earl, who was terribly truthful. "But I'm not going to put on side with you, you know. I'm not literary."

"What *do* you like?" asked Miss Hyatt Titus.

"I . . . I like being rowed by a pretty girl," said his lordship, gallantly, and blushing furiously.

"The Hatches will row you daily, I don't doubt. They're always paddling about."

"I think they're awfully handsome, and clever. They're cousins of yours, aren't they?"

"Yes, . . . distant."

"Oh," said the earl; and then the boat scraped the bottom, the farewells were spoken, and the thanks expressed.

"I shall be very glad to introduce you to my parents," said Miss Hyatt Titus, with much propriety, shoving off.

"Thanks, awfully," said the earl.

As he scrambled up to the Club through the pines he said, half aloud,—

"She's got nice sort of eyes and a pretty mouth; but I think the Hatch girls are nicer. That Muriel's a splendid woman. She's so alive and so unpretending. This little cousin . . . "

But the wind carried away his criticism.

Miss Highty Tighty told her father and mother of her encounter and her row. She spoke with some emphasis.

"I wonder why it is," she said, "that it is always the Hatch girls who introduce everybody to us. It seems to me, with our advantages, it ought to be the other way."

"Hoydens can always pick up young men," said Mrs. Hyatt Titus, "and I don't much like what you tell me. In my day . . . "

"Your day isn't this," replied her daughter, with considerable asperity and a heightened color, "and I'm sick of being cooped up."

Her father and mother looked at each other across their snowy table-linen. Her mother was a well-born, well-bred, well-read woman. She had, to be sure, rather abjured reading. How can a wife and mother

read, unless, indeed, she be, like "poor Mary," neglectful of these sacred, these hallowed trusts? She was one of those women who had always been a model; every one had approved of her; yet now her only duckling seemed inclined to question her absolute wisdom. It was preposterous, extraordinary! She could not understand.

"My little girl," she said, "isn't everything done for you?"

"Nothing's done for me," said the little girl. "I have been educated to death. But I am not half as amusing as the Hatch girls, after all."

"Your cousins," said Mr. Hyatt Titus, with assumed severity, "are poor patterns for you, my child. Look at your mother."

Violet looked at her mother. She saw a middle-aged lady in a prim gray silk; Mrs. Hyatt Titus belonged to that type which is always middle-aged. She therefore saw, I say, this middle-aged person, with some lace fastened at her neck by a brooch,—a likeness of her daughter in babyhood, set in pearls,—smooth, brown hair, coiled at the back, a pair of somewhat pursed-up lips, and two faded blue eyes. The contemplation awoke no answering thrill. She shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"I want to come out next winter, in town," she said, after a pause.

"I dare say your papa will take you out," said her mother.

"Cousin Mary Hatch says nobody can bring a girl out but her mother."

"I am afraid I should feel very strangely in a ballroom," said Mrs. Hyatt Titus. "I have always shrunk from the frivolous atmosphere of society. I should be

very sorry to have my daughter a mere woman of fashion."

"Well, there's not much danger," said Miss Hyatt Titus, tossing her head, "if we keep on this way."

"I think, my dear," said Mr. Hyatt Titus, "that our little girl is right. You must exert yourself more for her."

"What am I to do?" Mrs. Hyatt Titus now wrung her hands. The tears were almost in her eyes. Was her husband, too, going to find fault with her?

"You had better go and pay some visits to-morrow, mamma dear. The Club's full of ladies. They've passed a rule to have women there during the months of August and September. Lawrence Larremore brought up his wife last night. She's a very gay lady. You visit all her family in town. You'd better leave a card on her; and why not give a dinner?" After a while he added, tentatively, looking at his daughter with a smile, "We might ask this English gentleman."

"I've been thinking of a dinner," said Mrs. Titus.

III.

Over her black lace gown Mrs. Hyatt Titus donned a long gray silk cloak, and pinned a gray veil to her bonnet, because the roads were dusty and she was going visiting, and she hated dust. She decided to stop at the Club first and then drop in at the Hatches' before she paid two or three other ceremonial calls. She descended from her victoria, making a modest display of pearl-colored silk hose and of a chaste black shoe. She asked for Mrs. Larremore, and was told by the servant that Mrs. Larremore was at home.

She had begged her daughter to accompany her upon this pilgrimage, but the young lady had been rather out of sorts and had snappishly answered that she had other engagements. She had, in fact, dressed herself that afternoon and the two preceding ones with peculiar care, in the expectation that the Earl of Brownlow would call, and the fact that he had not yet fulfilled this common act of courtesy had awakened in her mind that surprised and vague self-depreciation which now and again came to mar the perfect belief she had always been taught to have in herself. "Was it possible he hadn't really admired her?" Well, there was always Willie Truden to fall back upon. He could be whistled up at any time. But the defection of the earl was bitter.

Mrs. Hyatt Titus was ushered through the hall into a wide, cool ground-floor room paved with mosaic and furnished in light-yellow chintz. There were two ladies in the room and six gentlemen. The ladies were Muriel Hatch and Mrs. Larremore. The former sat near an open window which overlooked the lake. By her side perched Willie Truden, and crouching at her feet on a low stool the Earl of Brownlow.

"How are you, Muriel?" said Mrs. Hyatt Titus, patronizingly, nodding to Miss Hatch.

"Brownie," said Mrs. Larremore to the earl, "fetch a chair for this lady."

"Brownie," thus admonished, rose, shook himself, and brought a chair. Mrs. Hyatt Titus sat upon its edge, threw back her cloak, and unfastened her veil.

"It's very dusty," she said.

"Is it?" said Mrs. Larremore. "I haven't stirred out from under these pines since I arrived."

Then she introduced the young Englishman.

"I think I know your daughter," he said, awkwardly.

"Yes; she told me how she had rescued you from the perils of our lake," smiling.

Then there was a dreadful pause. Mrs. Larremore came to the rescue. "I am so sorry you didn't bring your daughter to see me. I hear she's so pretty. Is she in society yet?"

"She's eighteen."

"I mean shall you launch her next winter?"

"I dislike the word," said Mrs. Hyatt Titus. "I am rather afraid of society. I think it pernicious."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Larremore, "how ever are the girls to get husbands, then? How can the men see them if they don't go out?"

"Surely, Mrs. Larremore, you would not have a girl go out looking for a husband?"

"Well, I don't know. Ah! here comes tea. Will you have cream? Yes? And sugar? Here, Brownie, give me the sugar-tongs. I think they might be doing worse things. Quiet girls nowadays don't seem to have any chance. It's the frivolous ones who make the good matches."

"I hope to keep my daughter," said Mrs. Hyatt Titus, with dignity, "as long as possible."

"I am sure she has only to show herself to be a success," said Mrs. Larremore.

"She's a lovely girl," said the mother; "or at least we think so."

"She must come and see me," said Mrs. Larremore.

She leaned over as she spoke and reached towards a rose-colored silk pouch or bag which lay near by, and which she drew towards her. It was filled with tobacco-leaf. By its side lay a lot of transparent leaves of rice-paper. Deftly with her long, jewelled fingers she began

to fill these with the herb, and then twisted them with a charming jerk into little rolls. She blew upon the folded edges, gave them a final pat, and, as she completed each cigarette, with a graceful gesture she threw them at the different men who were present, and who were drawn up about her tea-table. One cigarette fell and splashed into a cup, and there was applause and laughter. Mrs. Hyatt Titus, still sitting on the edge of her chair, looked on.

"Won't you have a light?" asked one of the young men, a handsome fellow with thick, curly brown hair.

"Thanks, yes," said Mrs. Larremore, and she began to smoke. "I suppose you have not this bad habit?" she said to Mrs. Hyatt Titus, smiling.

But Mrs. Hyatt Titus was voiceless, and her tongue felt parched. She could only shake her head.

"Take some cake, do," said her hostess, passing the plate towards her visitor.

"Help yourself first, Mrs. Larremore."

"I'm fat; I can't eat sweets. I'm banting."

"Fat! Why, you look to me unusually slender."

"Oh, that's only the result of force."

"Force?"

"Not my own; my maid's," said Mrs. Larremore, laconically. "She pulls me in."

"Are you not afraid of injuring your health?" asked Mrs. Hyatt Titus.

"There was a post-mortem the other day on some girls, and their . . . er . . . livers . . . and hearts . . . were quite out of place; on the wrong side of 'em, in fact," said the young gentleman with curly brown hair, "all lop-sided."

"Heavens!" said Mrs. Larremore. "I'll take a reef out after dinner. You frighten me, Gussie."

Mrs. Hyatt Titus blushed.

"Talking of post-mortems," continued Mrs. Larremore, leaning back and blowing rings of light smoke from between her pink gums and white teeth, "I see the murdered man there's been such a row about was cut open, and there was a lot of ground glass found in his stomach."

"The question is," said the curly-headed youth, "who put it there."

"It is impossible," said Mrs. Larremore, "to always fathom how these foreign substances get into the organism, but the lawyers say, and they think they know everything, that there is no doubt the wife put it there. Only fancy! A woman one used to visit! Isn't it quite horrid!"

"The *Times* this morning," said the earl, "has it she used to chuck his soup full of it."

"At any rate," said Mrs. Larremore, "it was there: that is the important thing. And to think that woman went to the bachelors' ball! Of course we really must draw the line somewhere; don't you think so, Mrs. Hyatt Titus?" but this lady was still dumb.

She was beginning to think that there was a moral and social disintegration in progress, of which she did not hold the secret, the throbbing of whose pulses she had as yet but feebly imagined. She was advancing haphazard, without map or charts, into new, untried deserts. Was her innocent child to be hurled into their unknown and arid quicksands?

Yet, strangely enough, these people, this woman, these men, who spoke so lightly of such terrible things, had a certain ease and poise about them that made her feel herself inferior to them, unimportant, out of place. Was this always the effect, she asked herself, of vul-

garity over refinement? It was pleasant to reflect that she would by and by pay other visits to other neighbors, as soon as she might effect an escape, where the tone was never lax and her own superiority was recognized.

She was rising to take leave, when, to her amazement, her husband was ushered into the Club drawing-room.

"I saw your carriage, my dear, as I passed returning from the station," he said to his wife, apologetically, "and so I came in to pay my respects to Mrs. Larremore.—I have long known your husband," he added, addressing this lady.

They all sat down once more. Mrs. Larremore threw away her cigarette.

Mr. Titus had a twig in his hand upon which an obese green caterpillar was disporting itself. It had round eyes and a face like a man.

"This is the Polyphemus. I could not resist stopping to pick it off the tree as I drove into the gate. It's a fine specimen."

"What an odd fellow he is!" said Mrs. Larremore; "and how clever you must be to know all about him!"

"He's a duffer," said the earl.

Carlyle and caterpillars were one to him.

The naturalist launched out into a lecture upon butterflies, moths, and insects in general, to which Mrs. Larremore listened luminously, in an absorbed and rapt attitude.

"You must come again and instruct us. We are very dull about these natural wonders here. Would that I might sit at your feet!" she said, and she looked into Mr. Hyatt Titus's fishy eyes with a tender beam

aslant her own half-shut lids. Then she turned and addressed the young men :

"What loafers you are, to be sure," she said, "and how ashamed you should be of your ignorance and your indolence ! Why don't you go out and look for . . . er . . . caterpillars ?"

"What a beautiful and charming person !" said Mr. Hyatt Titus when he was seated in the carriage next to his spouse. "She is really quite a goddess in appearance." His wife looked at him amazed. She had never heard such a flight of fancy from his lips before.

"I thought her extremely flippant," she answered, dryly.

"She seems serious enough," said Mr. Hyatt Titus, "and evinces an unusual interest in the natural sciences for a female."

"Before you came in she was quite flippant, quite,—and even worse," said his wife, belligerent.

"Oh, my dear, I'm afraid we're old fogies." And that was all the consolation offered.

Mrs. Larremore and her friends were laughing heartily.

"Poor little lady ! How she swallowed my story about lacing ! I wanted to astonish her, and I think I succeeded. It was very wicked of me. As to that nasty scandal, it completely paralyzed her. Well, it *is* upsetting. But tell me, Muriel dear, how ever are you and these prigs cousins ?"

The victoria rolled around the beach to the Hatches'. Mrs. Hatch was sitting in the corner of a low divan, and Mr. Hatch was lying upon it at full length, with his head in his wife's lap. She was smoothing his hair with her white fingers,—that hair which had once been so golden and was now dulling into grayness. Now

and then he looked up at her lovingly, and she rewarded him with one of those radiant smiles in which there still lurked for him an element of fascination.

"Here come the Highty Tightys," she said.

"Oh, bother!" said Mr. Hatch, irreverently.

Then the cousins arrived and the greetings were exchanged.

"We've just seen your Muriel," said Mrs. Hyatt Titus, settling herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Hatch looked at each other and smiled.

"Yes; she went over to the Club to take tea with Mrs. Larremore."

"A lovely woman," said Mr. Hatch.

"She's a great success," said Mrs. Hatch. "If your girl's going out next winter you ought to cultivate her."

"Do you?" asked Mrs. Hyatt Titus, abruptly.

"Why, Martha, how can we cultivate any one? We don't attempt much gaiety for the children. There are too many of them. You know we leave them here most of the year. But with your girl it will be different."

"She would only have to show herself," said Mrs. Titus, repeating Mrs. Larremore's words.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Hatch. "It is well to have no illusions about these things. The big city is a horrible maelstrom."

Just then Crummy gave a loud war-whoop. After innumerable failures, he had at last succeeded in lassoing the cat. He came up on the piazza leaving a trail of wet mud in his wake, and dragging his victim behind him.

"We're going to play at the French Relovution tomorrow. There's to be an execootion, and this cat's

got to die," he explained. "Sister May-Margaret says she'll make me a gibbetine."

The cat spluttered and her eyeballs protruded from their sockets, but when he released her, upon his father's command, she came back for more, whining. Master Wace would have been too wise, but this was a silly feminine thing which had wandered over from the next place.

"How are you, Crummy, my dear?" asked his cousin Martha, suavely. She disliked him thoroughly for an unmannered, unwashed, disagreeable little cub.

But Crummy, who was still practising his blood-curdling lesson, did not deign to answer.

"Mummy, can I go in swimming?"

"Why, you just came out," said his papa.

"How long ago did you eat?" asked his mother.

"I had lemon pie at the servants' supper," said Crummy.

He had read the story of Ananias and Sapphira, and he was a God-fearing if a dirty little boy.

"Then you can't go in," said his mother.

Then Crummy set up a wail, and had to be consoled and cajoled and given a puff-ball which belonged to his sister May-Margaret, and which she had expressly hidden from him under the piazza trellis-work, but which she now volunteered to bestow upon him if he would only stop screaming and be a good boy once more.

During this process of pacification Mr. Hatch, entirely undisturbed, began to discourse on a new criticism of Senancourt which he had just been reading aloud to his wife.

"He breathed," said Mr. Hatch, "the air of high mountains and fragrant forests. He escaped the heat

and glare of practical day, and leads one to contemplative repose. So says this critic, and he is right. It is a relief from that *vulgaire des sages* whose commonplaces De Senancourt so abhorred, and from which he was himself so free."

He wandered then to speak of the English poets of the last generation, of Byron, that meteoric creature consumed with the fevers of life, whose lot was cast among spent activities, and he gave his visitors a dissertation upon his merits and demerits.

"Darling," whispered his wife, leaning against his shoulder, "I like to hear you talk."

"Now you must tell the cousins our news," said Mr. Hatch, smiling at his wife, dismissing Senancourt and Byron in a trice, as men of the world alone know how to do.

"Yes, we have a great piece of news," said Mrs. Hatch.

May-Margaret looked up from her occupation, that of pulling Layamon's tail, and said, in her soft drawl,—

"Guess, Cousin Martha. It's very interesting. We're all wildly excited."

But Cousin Martha had no taste for riddles, and could not guess.

Then they were told that Muriel was engaged to be married to Willie Truden.

"Martha is an admirable woman, even a strong woman," said Mrs. Hatch, as the Hyatt Tituses drove away, "but she has not the gift of sympathy. She took our news coldly."

"And her girl's just like her," said Mr. Hatch. "Not *simpatica*,—not to me, at least. They were born hard."

Mrs. Titus thought life in fact rather hard as she

crunched off in her low, easy conveyance. Muriel! Was it possible! Well, why not? On their silent homeward drive tacitly she and her husband ignored the subject. But Mrs. Hyatt Titus realized that the strength of a desire is not gauged until it has been frustrated. How rounded, how perfect is the wish which has become hopeless! It is the same with love. Its frenzy lies in its denials. Fate is cruel; and it is not given to all to cry, "Though he slay me, yet will I praise him."

Mrs. Hyatt Titus was a "wife and mother." Her acquaintances were never left in doubt as to that fact. But of the magnetic currents that sway the destinies of men and women, of the blind forces that control them, of the scars and jars and jangles of human motive, she knew as little as the lively kitten which ran under her rocking-chair to catch her ball of worsted, or as the rows of splendid cabbages that adorned the kitchen-garden behind the terraced walk.

She paid no more visits that afternoon.

IV.

Miss Hyatt Titus had on one of her most æsthetic gowns, and was carrying a tinted cream-and-gold edition of Æschylus in one hand,—how she loathed it all, except the binding!—as she stepped across the lawn to meet Mrs. Larremore, who, followed by the Earl of Brownlow, walked in at the gate. Mrs. Larremore was flushed and rather tired.

Fighting fat was all very well, if one had the man of one's heart beside one to tell one that it had been fought to some purpose. But this lubberly Englishman, this "Brownie," was not complimentary, not even amusing;

appallingly dull, in fact. When he opened his big mouth at all to a woman it was generally to vaunt the charms of some absent one. On this occasion his enthusiasm had found vent in extolling the loveliness of Muriel Hatch. Mrs. Larremore was becoming a little sick of it. She wondered how it would seem to belong to that large and long-suffering class of women who accept this sort of pabulum as their every-day ration ; who are talked to by men about other women's attractions, who climb mountains with other women's lovers, are rowed about lakes by sporadic males in flannel shirts, simply as ballast and nothing more, fasten on other girls' veils and *bouquets de corsage* for them, stand about on side-walks while their friends pass on coaches, and, what is worse, are sunk in such an apathy of dreariness that they do not even fathom the horror of their situation.

Miss Hyatt Titus invited them to sit under the trees while she called her mamma, but Mrs. Larremore expressed herself surfeited with heat and glare after this exercise imposed upon herself for the conservation of her figure's lines, and said she would prefer to go into the house. Here in a moment Mrs. Hyatt Titus joined her, and the daughter of the house, looking coyly up at the young Englishman from under her long lashes, suggested to this gentleman a walk in the garden.

Mrs. Larremore, having been given a fan, had soon regained her elegant composure in the dim freshness of a pleasant drawing-room. Some glasses of lemonade were brought in.

"Is there sugar?" asked Mrs. Larremore. "I must take it very sour, on account of my banting." Her heightened color only added to her beauty.

So thought Mr. Hyatt Titus, who, to his wife's sur-

prise, not only did not endeavor to escape, as was his wont when visitors were announced, but came in and established himself in a large arm-chair in close proximity to Mrs. Larremore's skirts.

"This is the Luna moth of which I spoke to you," said he, handing a tiny twig with a worm sitting upon it to the "goddess."

"What an old idiot, with his Luna!" thought Mrs. Larremore. But she smiled sweetly, and, leaning forward, took the thing in her hands.

She was not afraid of worms or of mice or of men. That sort of squeamishness has gone out of date. But she did not care much for natural history, except, indeed, such as the realistic novelists afforded her. She leaned forward and asked questions intently, as if the Luna was the key-note of her aspiration, the long-sought-for problem of a wasted career.

She did not twist cigarettes to-day, nor allude to her tight lacing. Her movements were easy and rhythmical in raiment of lace and mull which lent itself clingingly to her plastic poses. Her converse, indeed, was soft and seemly, and her manners, like her dress, perfect. Yet Mrs. Hyatt Titus was uneasy in her presence. She had that vague sense of disapproval which had haunted her before, and which seemed to rob her of her powers of speech. She found herself—and she took pride in speaking the purest English—awkward in her words, involved in her sentences, and even at times growing ungrammatical. Mrs. Larremore's pervasive, nervous vitality was simply too much for her own, and she finally collapsed into long silences.

Her husband, on the contrary, seemed peculiarly exhilarated. He talked incessantly, and, she noticed, really appeared to very unusual advantage. He took

Mrs. Larremore about to show her his pictures and books, his museum of curiosities, the lady swaying after him gracefully, trailing her delicate draperies. "Cleverly done! Exquisite! A fine bit of foreground! Most instructive!"—she murmured, as the occasion might warrant, while the hostess brought up the rear in her short, round frock which the laundress seemed to have stupidly overstarched for the occasion. And by and by they stepped out across the lawn to see the chickens,—wonderful fowls that had won no end of prizes and honorable mentions,—and Mrs. Larremore actually looked at and extolled them.

In the mean while the earl was being dragged by his fair companion farther away over the Hyatt Titus property, and as she dragged him she managed to bother him a good deal about Æschylus.

"He was fifty-three when he took his first prize for the Persians, you know," she said.

"You don't say!" said the earl. "It seems rather old, doesn't it?"

"It proves," said Miss Hyatt Titus, encouragingly, "that it is never too late to improve one's self. One may learn . . . one may succeed . . . late."

"I should say that was rather slow, though, eh?" said the earl, with an attempt at jocularity, and falling over at the same moment a concealed stump. He picked up a large foot and began to nurse it.

"Take care you don't fall," said Miss Hyatt Titus. "There are lots of these stumps in this pine copse."

"They're damned . . . er . . . I beg your pardon . . . unpleasant," said the earl, again stubbing his toes. "Why don't you have them . . . er . . . removed?"

"There's so much to be done on such a large domain," said Violet.

The place of sixty acres did not, however, seem to greatly dazzle the Earl of Brownlow, who drove twenty miles from his gate at Draco Towers to the portals of his home, and who had several other estates of almost similar proportions; nor did the tiny glass houses through which his young hostess propelled his bulkiness startle a young gentleman accustomed to miles of graperies and palm-houses. He made no allusion, however, to any of his possessions. But everything that the girl had and knew, had not and did not know, was made to dance in his honor.

When they returned to the house, Mr. Hyatt Titus, who seemed in high good humor, again, to the amazement of his women, was cordial to the stranger, and even invited him to come and pass a few days.

"Thanks awfully. I'm off for the Rockies," said the earl.

"When you come back, then," said the man of affairs to the man of pleasure.

"I'd like it immensely," said the earl.

Then Mrs. Hyatt Titus chimed in, and the time was fixed for six weeks later.

"What in the world," said Mrs. Larremore to him later on their way home, "possessed you to accept that invitation? Those people would put me under the sod in three days, with their 'culture' and their chickens. Why will superficial undigested culture always howl and roar when the real assimilated article slips about silently and unobtrusively? Did the child drag you about to see the chickens, too? My brother-in-law raises chickens at his place. To me chickens all look exactly alike. They're very tiresome. But one can never tell about these things. He insists there are enormous differences. It may be so. The girl's

picturesque," continued Mrs. Larremore, "but she's disappointing."

"She worries one awfully," said the earl.

"I can well imagine, Brownie, that the æsthetic literary is not your type."

She did not ask him what his type was, nor look up at him coquettishly. It was quite useless. There was no use in wasting one's shot. Well, no matter. Consolation was coming up in the 4.10 boat that night.

"I think the Hatch girls are jolly."

"There are a great many of them."

"I like Muriel," said the earl.

"Ah! Of course. You like Muriel, man-like, because she's mortgaged."

"Do you think she cares for the fellow, Mrs. Larremore?" Brownlow's face gloomed.

"Who can tell anything about girls?" said Mrs. Larremore, sighing. And then she added, with that distinct taste for mischief which possessed her, "Why don't you stay and cut him out yourself, Brownie?"

The earl's heavy face brightened as he turned to her.

"Now you chaff," he said.

The Hyatt Tituses gave a dinner-party. It was in honor of Muriel Hatch and Willie Truden. Miss Hyatt Titus covered her cousin with congratulations, affection, and flowers. Willie Truden was in high spirits. But Muriel was silent. Her dark blue eyes had a sombre, strange expression in their depths, and her laughing mouth was almost stern. Arriving a little late, she explained, somewhat flustered, that the Earl of Brownlow had come to say good-by to them all, and that she had not noticed the hour.

"He's coming to stop with us when he returns," said

her cousin, in a disengaged manner, but with a secret toss of triumph.

"That will be just in time for the wedding," said Willie Truden.

"Is it to be so soon?" asked Mrs. Titus, suavely.

"Just as soon as ever Muriel's willing," said Willie Truden, ardently. "I'll be on hand, you may be certain."

But Muriel still said nothing.

It was just two weeks before the wedding-day that the earl returned. He was landed with his traps, his tub, his valise, his boxes, his bag, his shawls and his umbrellas, his hat-boxes, his rifle, his fishing-tackle, on the Hyatt Titus piazza steps. One or two girls and a couple of young men had been found and pressed into service as a nucleus to the house-party invited to welcome him. But I may as well say at once that on this visit, which lasted ten long days, the Brownlow escutcheon did not cover itself with glory,—this visit, for which Miss Titus had provided herself with three new frocks, four new hats, and, oh, with what dreamings!

Very early every morning Draco carried himself, or had himself carried, across the lake, and remained until twilight fell at the house of Hatch. In vain Miss Hyatt Titus asked him to join this or that picnic or party, organized before his arrival for his especial benefit, ramped in fury up and down the length and breadth and silence of her own bed-chamber, bullied her mother when she caught her alone on the back stairs, or came down smiling sweetly into the arena where women must meet friend and foe alike with unruffled calm and accept mortification with a serene front.

Once only did the earl consent to join one of these excursions, and this was upon an occasion when Muriel

Hatch was of the party. Her *fiancé* had gone up to town that day to look to some final arrangements for the wedding which was drawing nigh.

The excursion led them across the sand-spit. They were to drive in half a dozen vehicles, then to embark in various sailing-craft, and after an hour's sail the pleasure-seekers would be landed upon a wild, lonely shore. Here would be found lots of surf, sand, and rock, and a wooden structure with a pavilion which pushed itself seaward, and under whose green-and-white awnings soft-shell crabs and roasted clams were served up in specially toothsome fashion to such persons as needed refection.

It was too soon for luncheon when they landed, so the party scattered in twos and threes, mostly twos, and wandered off to the rocks. Miss Hyatt Titus made a dab for Brownlow as a matter of vanity, for she was beginning to hate him. But, heavy as he was, he managed to elude her rather cleverly, and was soon walking off under the fluttering guidance of Muriel Hatch's pink petticoat. She wore a jaunty sailor-hat with a rose-colored ribbon about it. The wind was in her wavy brown hair. She seemed very lovely and very desirable to the young Englishman. He lounged by her side through the damp sand which the receding tides had left encrusted with shiny pebbles and gaudy shells; her narrow foot and his broad one left prints behind them into which the water rose darkling.

"I say," said the earl, "aren't you tired? Let me swing you up here."

So saying, he seized the girl's hands and drew her up by his side on the ledge of rocks which they had reached, and behind which they found the waves lashing themselves into fervor.

"It's splendid here," said Muriel, drawing in her breath quickly. "I like this spray cutting my face. It gives one courage."

"Is that what you want, courage?" said the earl, looking at her very hard. "You're plucky enough, I fancy."

"I shall need it all, all the courage I have. But not for what you believe," said Muriel.

"I don't know what to believe."

"Promise me you'll not think ill of me, whatever happens."

"How can I think ill of you, when . . . "

Muriel put a finger on her lip. "Take care," she said.

"I'm perfectly miserable," said the earl.

"I have a secret to tell you, my friend," said Muriel, solemnly. "May I intrust it to your honor?"

"That's all right," said the earl, shaking his head.

"I shall never marry Willie Truden," said Muriel, solemnly.

"I say!" said the earl.

"Never, never! It's been a horrible mistake. Horrible! You may as well know it,—I'm going to run away."

"Where shall you go?" eagerly, edging a little nearer.

But Muriel drew away from him, keeping him at some distance.

"I know not; probably to San Francisco, or perhaps to Greece. I may try to get a place as a governess or a type-writer, or something like that," said Muriel, "or else I shall go on the stage. My family will hear of me no more forever. I shall be lost to them."

"Oh, Muriel! take me with you," said the earl, growing crimson, "for I love you."

"Oh!" said Muriel.

"I adore you! You're the darlingest girl I ever saw."

"That's what you said of my cousin that first night in the boat."

"I said that of your cousin? I never said it: I never thought it. What! That silly little girl?"

"Yes, you did; and she's never silly. That's what's the matter with her."

"I must have been thinking about you. I was crazy then already, wretched. I didn't know what I was about."

If this was one of those perjuries at which the gods laugh, Muriel, being a mortal maiden, swallowed it.

"Will you really help to save me from my revolting fate?" she asked, tragically.

The revolting fate was indulging in shrimps and a glass of port at Delmonico's at that very moment; considered as an epitome of an unhappy destiny, he certainly looked mild enough.

"I'll carry you off this very minute to the city and we'll be married to-night by the first parson we meet, if you'll only say you love me, Muriel."

"I worship you!" said Muriel.

"Then Willie Truden can go to the devil," said the earl.

"As fast as ever he chooses. There are so many of us; I thought it would be a good thing for the others. But . . . I can't," said Muriel, a little wildly, inebriated, no doubt, by the sharp air and her new lord's bold methods.

"I found," she continued, raising her head and looking at him, "that I liked you best."

"Oh, my beauty! Give me your lips," said Draco, with Homeric simplicity and fire.

"No," said Muriel. "Never. Here is my hand."

He took and wrung her thin brown fingers in his pink ones. She had shaken off Truden's large diamond —she would have called it the insignia of her slavery— into her top drawer that morning, and wore for all adornment on her littlest finger a jagged silver circle cut out of a ten-cent piece by Master Crummy.

But, like Canute, the lover cannot stop the waves of life, and a moment later their young lips had met and clung. It was a salt caress, for the sea had kissed them first, leaving behind its taste of ardent brine.

The first physical touch is the abyss in which many an ideal has foundered. There are kisses that seal a man's freedom, as there are those which rivet his bondage. Mary Hatch and her poet-husband had distilled in the veins of their offspring some drop of flame, fused of their own loving. It seemed all concentrated to-day in Muriel's breath of roses.

"I'm the happiest man on earth," said the earl, drinking of its sweetness with rapt fervor. "You're just too perfectly lovely, you know."

"What will our . . . families say?" said Muriel, settling her hat.

How horrid Truden had seemed to her! She never would sit and talk to him through their brief betrothal unless her mother were in the room and the library table between them, and here . . . !

"Oh, hang the families! I've only my sister, and she's got nothing to say on the subject; and as to yours—well, if they cut up rough we'll arrange it all when . . . when we get back."

"Yes, . . . let us forget everybody," said Muriel, still a little intoxicated by the winds and waves of this new sea,—"it's so . . . so delicious here."

"Yes," said the earl, "perfectly delicious."

"And I don't know why," said Muriel, "but it's being wrong seems to make it nicer, sweeter, dearer, doesn't it?"

Ah, Muriel! daughter of Eden! The hot sun flooded their young hearts.

"It isn't wrong," said the young man, his brow irradiated by his adoration. "It's the other thing that was criminal, don't you see?"

"I don't know," said Muriel, who had inherited analytical tendencies from her papa. "Can a thing be wrong if the motive is a high one?"

"That's rot, you know," said the more practical Briton, decidedly.

"But," said Muriel, dreamily, "it's such a strange experience of mine, when I do wrong I am not always conscious of God's displeasure. I still feel as if he loved me and would have a care for me in spite of all."

"Of course he loves you."

"I sometimes think," said Muriel, earnestly, "it is quite impossible there should only be room in his sight and his heaven for the narrow, tiresome, disagreeable, dull people who are called 'good,'—people like Cousin Martha, for instance. Don't you suppose he likes the others too,—they that are wider and wilder, though sometimes erring? Think what heaven will be like if the great and the brilliant, who are so often wayward, are to be shut out of it forever and forever! What do *you* think?"

"'Pon my honor, I've never thought about it at all, you know," said the earl. "There's a dear girl—I wouldn't bother."

A shadow fell over Muriel's beautiful face: it came of the first perceived lack of sympathy. Muriel's was not

a nature to be filled easily. Her deep and restless heart marked her *d'avance* as one of those women who are to have a career in love and who are to be tossed on many breakers. But Muriel was a fine and healthy young creature who loved the sunshine with its glory and warmth, and the moment now sufficed.

The earl blinked his eyes like a young owl, blinded by the light in his own soul. On Muriel's horizon arose fugitive palaces and shadowy gardens where every dream and desire should be reached.

V.

HAVING failed to capture the earl, Miss Highty Tighty had turned her mind towards smaller game. There was the new young clergyman. He had arrived to pay a parochial call, just as the battalion was wheeling off, and had weakly yielded to the entreaties of two somewhat neglected maidens, who brought up the rear of the procession in a species of go-cart, to climb in with them and join the procession. Miss Highty Tighty had smiled and called out from the head of the line, where she was marshalling her forces, that she would be "charmed" if he would do so.

It may be said here that this earnest young priest was much torn between a distinct desire to do his duty, to be ascetic, to be self-sacrificing,—he advocated the celibacy of the priesthood,—and strong natural proclivities to pleasure. He had a high appreciation of all the joys nature proffers, and, above all, that of *le haut parfum féminin*. This perfume was too much for him on this lovely summer's morning, and he swung himself up behind the go-cart with more alacrity than he would have cared to admit in the confessional.

It must be conceded, however, that persons who incessantly sacrifice their tastes and desires to others, and appear devoid of every form of egoism, have generally a low vitality, a certain lack of temperament, an indifference to the interests of their own destinies, which do not always spring from positively generous purposes. A healthy love of life is naturally selfish; if all selfish effort were criminal, the ponderous wheels of the earth's machinery would soon grow clogged. Fortunately, we need have no fear in this matter. The Father Damiens will remain forever exceptional creatures, before whom a world may well stand uncovered.

The new country parish of the Rev. Clement Parachute was made up largely, nay, almost exclusively, of city people, who had themselves driven up to the church of a Sunday morning, in a variety of fine equipages, dressed in smart summer bravery,—they usually arrived late,—and left an empty treasury and vacant pews behind them in the autumn. In this dispiriting atmosphere he hoped that the Hyatt Tituses would be found a tonic and a support. They were, he was told, the oldest inhabitants, and the stanchest church people. They were also the richest, which was more to the point. The young lady was, therefore, doubly interesting to him, not only as his hostess of to-day, but as a possible ally in his work of to-morrow. He strongly believed in attracting the younger and more ardent element. He was himself both young and ardent.

He was a thin, deep-eyed, narrow-chested fellow, burning with energy and ambition, a trifle reckless of consecrated opinion, intelligent, even possessing some talent, and of a romantic, warm disposition. Having failed to impress the earl, Miss Hyatt Titus decided to impress this ingenuous divine. Not being a young

person of much imagination or resource, nothing better suggested itself to her than to "talk shop" to him,—in other words, to show the profoundest interest in the church, in the parochial work, and the poor of the neighborhood. A pretty girl with a mauve parasol, who hangs on your words, and seems to consider "slumming" the end of existence, is not often too strictly analyzed by such a critic as the Reverend Clement Parachute. How could he fathom the vexation of his fair companion at the defection of that ill-bred lout the Briton, and the poignant resentment which Muriel Hatch's indiscreet behavior was, for some occult reason, stirring in her cousin's breast? "She is a bad girl," she was saying to herself; the thought was pleasant to her and pregnant. Undoubtedly the house-fly, that commonplace member of every household, mistakes every spot on the table-cloth for an eclipse of the sun.

When she leaned to him smiling, he saw only a gleam of pretty teeth, and heard with pleasure her assurances that she would slum with him any day he might select or see fit; that, in fact, literary pursuits and "slumming" were the only occupations which pleased and gratified her. If she made these assurances in a somewhat *distraite* manner, it eluded the clergyman's spiritual perceptions.

Mrs. Larremore, in the mean while, was making the most of the "Consolation," who, in a pair of white duck trousers and a blue flannel jacket, was lying on the sands at her feet. This lady had vouchsafed to chaperon the party. She was passing a couple of days at the Club again, and had provided her own entertainment, with a proper degree of forethought. Mrs. Larremore was one of those women who pass to have

a worse bark than bite; in other words, her laxity in conversation was her protection. There are simple souls who believe that still waters run deep. She therefore, notwithstanding one or two rather hazy moments in her career, always managed to emerge into the light of day with an untarnished escutcheon and flying colors. Her pulses were always cool; the sphygmograph would have been found superfluous to count their throbbings. She was now engaged in persuading the young gentleman at her feet, who was several years her junior, that it was advisable to marry a woman much older than one's self. She could not marry him now, because she was married already; but then one never knew what misfortune the future might present! "It is only the monstrous selfishness of the male," she was saying, "that requires a young creature to serve his brain-softening processes. All women of genius have treated themselves, late in life, to nice young husbands, and I think it was a proof of their wit. Even the dignity and certainty of talent requires companionship. All superiority creates a vacuum about it. Genius is isolation. Madame de Staël, the Duchess of Albany, Miss Mulock, Miss Thackeray, George Eliot, etc.,—clever women these."

"But how great a difference do you think there ought to be?" asked the "Consolation," anxiously.

"What are years where there is . . . er . . . love?" said the lady, with her eyes in the azure.

"Yes, yes, of course."

"To awaken the imagination, to touch the heart, that is everything."

"Yes, of course," sighed the "Consolation," with an elevated lyric eyebrow.

"Time robs us of all illusions, but establishes the

decisions of nature, its impulses, its magnetic currents" . . . "hang it if I know what I'm talking about," thought Mrs. Larremore, who was not devoid of humor; but her adorer seemed impressed.

"What a clever woman you are!" he sighed, looking up at her.

"Depend upon it, the highest forms of admiration and of love are those gained in spite of something, under protest:" . . . "that is better; there is some wit in that," she reflected.

"I feel such a lout near you," said the "Consolation." "I am like a stupid, sluggish, straight canal, and you like a beautiful, sunlit, meandering river."

"Rather meandering, that is a fact," thought Mrs. Larremore.

"I find you an attractive fellow, you know," she said, brushing his hair with the lace of her sunshade. His silly heart turned over in his breast with a leap and a thump, and he leaned back and took a long look at her eyes, which were probably delightful to men because they were always free from blame or counsel. They could be pitiful, or flash with fun, but were rarely reproving, which was comforting.

So, in idle babblings the day wore on, and by and by the party, a trifle sunbrowned and dishevelled, a little surfeited with winds and waves and each other, met again, and mounted into their respective equipages, and were driven homeward across the twilight.

But that evening there was a great cry in two households, for two of the party were among the missing: one was the stranger within the gates, and the other the pet lamb of a neighboring fold!

With her hair secured on a single hair-pin, and a fresh, crisp peignior over her modest night-gown, Mrs.

Titus sat on the edge of her daughter's bed, between whose fragrant sheets this coy damsel had just introduced herself.

"To-morrow," she said, sententiously, "to-morrow, after luncheon, your father and myself will have ourselves driven over to the Hatcheries. I must condole with your unfortunate cousin Mary upon her daughter's misconduct. I did not wish to intrude too soon."

"She will be a countess, and they say his country-houses are legion."

"Such horrible publicity!" gasped the mother; "the marriage in all the papers already, to-night, with frightful details! Well, Willie Truden has had a narrow escape."

"He will marry Audrey now; they are exactly suited. Oh, they will keep him!"

"I should think he would dread that family."

"They are not the kind that men dread," said the girl, raising her head from her pillow, upon her white arm; "and the sooner that is understood, the better."

Six months later Audrey did, in fact, lead her sister's jilted millionaire to the altar; and she has made him pay for the fact of not having been his first choice by the rapidity with which she assists him to scatter his ducats, her equipages and toilets having become, I am told, the talk of two continents.

Audrey is a thick-haired, strong-footed, muscular, ambitious young person, with a fine figure. She sits in a carriage regally. She is far better suited to Willie Truden, who is not overburdened with brains, than the pleasure-loving, easy-going Muriel could ever have been.

VI.

THE Reverend Parachute and Miss Hyatt Titus started forth together on their errand of charity at eleven o'clock the following morning. She mentioned to the young clergyman a certain Mrs. Deams who was supposed to be sufficiently poor and rheumatic to become an object of sympathy. Poverty in this neighborhood was a comparative term; pauperism was unknown—everybody had jam and doughnuts for supper.

Mrs. Deams lived in a copse on the outskirts of the town. They concluded to call upon her first. The new young rector had Mrs. Deams down on his books, but had not yet made her acquaintance. He found that his fair comrade had dressed herself expressly for the excursion. She had replaced the usual æsthetic fine fabrics of her choice by a gown cut from a material of dark and serious aspect and rather antiquated as to its mode. Her head was tied up in a bag of thick black veiling, and a sombre sunshade was held down low over her eyes.

They walked across the fields together, chatting a little stiffly, and less than twenty minutes brought them to the back of Mrs. Deams's property. A hole in the whitewashed fence could readily admit them into a small poultry-yard which adjoined the pig-sty, whose odors suggested that it had languished uncared for through a hot season. Across this unsavory morass a narrow footpath led to the well and up to the low front door with its honeysuckled porch. Just as they cleared the rail fence a man in the road spied Mr. Parachute and begged him to step out and speak with him for a moment. Miss Hyatt Titus was, therefore, left for a few minutes alone. She was standing undecided as to her

next move, when a shrill voice accosted her from an upper window:

"Oh, Mary Jane, did you bring the letter?"

To this she naturally gave no response.

"Oh, Mary Jane," persisted the voice, querulously, "are ye going to answer me or no? Did ye bring the letter?"

"I am not . . . Mary Jane," adventured Miss Hyatt Titus.

"Lord ha' mercy on us, miss!" said Mrs. Deams. "You was dressed so plain. Who ever would ha' thought you was a real lady?" And with this ejaculation she drew her head into the house.

Our young lady's regret at the severity of her costume was balanced by the pleasure she felt that Mr. Parachute had not overheard the remark. He now joined her, and Mrs. Deams issued from the house. She was a jagged person, very tall, and dressed in a nondescript calico garment, somewhat soiled, which fell away straight from her sharp shoulders, innocent of shapeliness or of belting. On her scant hair she wore a sunbonnet, from which protruded her gray, gaunt visage. Its most salient trait was a walrus tooth protruding from under her long upper lip. She hurried forward hospitably, passing the back of her hand and arm across her mouth; then, darting at her visitor, she cast a sinewy arm about her shrinking figure and imprinted a tusky embrace upon her recoiling cheek. She then shook hands for fully five minutes with a certain degree of violence with the young priest, while the girl was trying to reconcile herself to what was over, a philosophic wisdom only acquired through long and severe experience.

Mrs. Deams, having thus emphasized her welcome,

ushered her guests into her best parlor, with a "I hope I see you both well." This apartment was not in very excellent order, but Mrs. Deams had one attribute of good breeding: she never cast discredit upon herself by apology. She therefore made no excuses either for her disordered rooms or for her negligent apparel. She was evidently bent upon entertaining her guests, and only wasted a few inevitable moments in remarks upon health and weather. Almost immediately after they had settled themselves she rose and went to the mantelpiece, from whose encumberment she disengaged two photographs.

"Them's my two men," she said.

One was the portrait of a rough-hewn farmer dressed in his Sunday clothes, with a chin-beard and a shock of heavy gray hair; a man of about sixty. The other was that of a much younger person, with a dare-devil expression in his eyes, and broad shoulders. He looked like a clerk in some small city store out for his holiday; such a young gentleman as the village girls call "interesting," with a pathetic inflection upon the "rest."

"That is my old man," said Mrs. Deams. "He ain't pretty to look at, but he was a decent body for all that. His forehead was kind o' wrinkled, and he had bronkity, so as his voice sounded queer sometimes, as if it come out of a tunnel. And that's my second, and Lord ha' mercy on me for all the trouble he give me!"

"We heard you had to . . . er . . . "

Here Mr. Parachute felt called upon to exhale a sigh.

"I hadn't been with him six month," said Mrs. Deams, crisply, "when up comes another woman——"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Parachute.

"Yes, sir, that's so; and I a decent woman who'd always borne a good character and ain't a-going to

damn her soul to please him or another. 'No,' says I, 'no other woman for me, . . . or him. I'm first an' last an' th' only one, or I'll know it.' So I jest turned him out and had him up for bigam' before you could turn your hand. Yes, sir! my papers is square, and *he* locked up for a twelvemonth. But laws ha' mercy! for all that he was a clean fellow, and nice-spoken, and I ain't a-going to say a word ag'in him behind his back. Ain't he a pretty man?"

It was very evident which of her two ventures Mrs. Deams had found the most to her taste. She looked lovingly at the face of her betrayer, and with a sigh placed the two pictures side by side in front of the clock. It was only her wholesome fear of hell-fire which had driven her to the extreme measure of a separation.

And who shall deny the wholesomeness of fear? Mrs. Deams is not the only one it sways. The cultured, the strong, the powerful, also tremble. Fear moves the world, and it is well. In delicate souls it is that vague premonition of loss, of being shut out, away from all that made life sweet and good, that presage of a loneliness that is in itself the doom of deterioration, that sense of being cut off that wrings tears from the child whose mother refuses to smile. We all grope in these *tenebræ*. Our welfare is the result of this one motor which quickens more than it kills. Even a woman's beauty is the result of her sacrifices. Watch her at ball and supper. This draught of air will ruin her complexion: she avoids it. This pâté will increase her weight: "No, thank you!" The fear of consequences arrests the cup at the man's lips, protects faltering innocence. He who hesitates is generally . . . saved. He who prates of virtue for virtue's sake prates—and that is all. Why does man work? Is it not in fear of

poverty and pain? or at best to ease the restlessness of a superfluous energy? Why does he rest? Is it not in dread of those lapses of the brain, that thought of its overwrought tension which whispers to him of impending catastrophe? Fear does more for us than hope. To the unimaginative joy is pale. Few have the temperament which tastes of it deeply; of the poignancies of happiness or of pleasure few know aught. But some measure of suffering has been accorded to all. We all know that—God be praised—All hail, then, Our Lady of Suffering! the Angel of a Saint Teresa!

Violet sitting on a hard-backed chair began to think slumming a very poor sort of pastime. She asked about Mrs. Deams's rheumatism, which drew forth a realistic account of this lady's diseases, treated with that vigor and force which must always tend to diminish the refinement and grace of life; and pervading all was the odor of the pig-sty! But Mrs. Deams, being American born, did not view her visitors' call as a work of philanthropy. She insisted on opening a jar of her best preserves; she brought out some jelly-cake for them, and thrust a bunch of honeysuckles into the girl's hand.

Soon the slummers found themselves in the road again. It was a dirty day, spitting rain; the road was muddy, and they concluded to put off their further evolutions until another morning, for slum on her petticoat did not suit this daughter of a New England mother. They were just turning in at the gate when Tim, the paralytic, came bowling along. He had been up to the big house to get his weekly pension. He was blatant as usual, and as noisy as a bull-calf at the sight of new victims. He stepped directly in front of them.

"Good-mornin', miss! Just seen your ma."

"Good-morning, Tim," blandly. "How are you?"

"Father's crosser'n cross," said Tim.

"I'm sorry to hear this, my good fellow," said Mr. Parachute, deprecatingly.

"Well, you see," said Tim, with a one-sided smile, "he ain't my father at all."

"Let us walk on," said Miss Hyatt Titus, hurriedly, who had heard Tim's history before. "You know he's quite silly."

But Mr. Parachute was on parochial duty bent, and felt that this matter should be investigated. "Have you an unhappy home, my good fellow?" he asked.

Now, it was very rarely that any one stopped long enough by the wayside to hearken to poor Tim's wrongs. He was a man of about thirty, with wild hair and a useless hand which had swung at his side for fifteen years. He could just manage to drag his limbs along. He spent most of his time upon the country roads, covering during the week a number of miles, back and forth, back and forth, from village to lake and lake to village. People threw him a kind word and gave him money now and then, but of listeners he had few, and Tim loved to talk and talk of himself. Most of his countrymen do, even when not infesters of the highways or paralyzed in their lower limbs. Americans strike the balance of their unselfish actions by the arrant egotism of their conversation.

"You see," he now went on, overjoyed to have an audience; "he ain't my father at all."

"He isn't your father?" asked the candid rector, with a surprised intonation. "Why . . . "

"Well, he ain't." Tim neared Mr. Parachute and winked one of his bleared eyes with a painful contrac-

tion. "I'm a come-by-chance: that's what they calls me."

He delivered himself of this cheerful announcement as if it had been a light pleasantry. Mr. Parachute flushed crimson under his wide-brimmed black hat, while his companion took the mud-puddle at one leap and hurried away under the dripping boughs.

"Good-by, good-by, my good fellow," said the clergyman, splashing after her. "Good-by. I'll see you another day. I cannot stop now."

Slumming with a very young girl was distinctly impracticable. Mr. Parachute added this one to his life's experiences. It is a pity that so many of our most useful lessons have to be learned in company!

VII.

Mr. Hatch had followed his flying couple, and had finally found them installed in what is called an up-town hotel. They were sitting together on the marble centre-table of their private drawing-room, eating buttered toast and drinking lemonade; upon their knees was extended a map of the universe, and they were planning their wedding journey. Muriel made one leap to the floor and in a moment had fallen upon her father's breast. She buried her pretty face in his blond beard and splashed a large tear there. Mr. Hatch had already assured himself that the Rev. Dr. Prendergast had tied the knot irrevocably, the night before, in the presence of two serious and competent witnesses.

"How could you so treat us, my daughter?" he said, disengaging himself from her clinging fingers. "Have you ever had reason to think your mamma or I would force you into a hateful marriage?"

To his son-in-law he was very cold, only nodding to him distantly. The earl himself was extremely red and sheepish.

Muriel hung her head. "No, papa," she said.

"Yet you have behaved as if you did. And you, sir, how dare you so basely repay our hospitality? It was abominable!"

"I'm awfully sorry, I'm sure," said the earl. "But you see . . . "

"Dear papa," said Muriel, "forgive us! I did think it was so romantic."

Then her father tried to look very savage, but his girl, who knew him well, fancied she detected a gleam of amusement in his eyes, and the little imp was not slow to take advantage. An hour later the three were breakfasting together,—and Mr. Hatch's appetite was better than that of the lovers.

It was upon his return, and just after a long communion between himself and his wife, when all had been explained, discussed, adjusted, accepted, that Cousin Martha whirled up to the door upon her visit of condolence.

It was Saturday, and Crummy had been tortured into a clean shirt which he had visibly outgrown, and was standing at his mother's knees in the drawing-room, committing his Sunday-school lesson to memory.

"'And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee?'"

"And the Lord opened the ear of the ass," repeated Crummy, with a wandering window-ward eye.

"My son, will you pay attention?" said his mamma. "If you do not you will have to be severely punished."

"And the Lord said——there's a carriage and pair," said Crummy.

In a moment Mrs. Hyatt Titus had crossed the threshold. "How are you, Mary? How do you do, Crumbar?"

"Thank you, I am pretty well," said Crumbar, delighted with the interruption. Then he took the opportunity of delivering himself of what was uppermost in his mind.

"Sister Muriel's skipped off with the Englishman," he said.

Cousin Martha closed her eyes and opened them again very slowly. She looked significantly at Mrs. Hatch, as much as to say, "Shall you not send this child away, or at least reprove him?"

But Mrs. Hatch was one of those women who rarely respond to expectation. She aggravatingly did neither.

She did release him, however, from his lesson, and he found his way to the window, where he amused himself killing mosquitoes, enlivening this ferocious occupation with frequent war-whoops of triumph.

"Your daughter's misconduct . . . " began Mrs. Hyatt Titus——

"We will not talk of it, please," said Mrs. Hatch, rather sharply.

"I am glad, dear Mary, that you can dismiss it. There are people who rally more quickly than others from such blows."

"I don't think I understand you," said Mrs. Hatch.

"A marriage begun under such auspices seems to have so little promise of solidity,—is such a poor preparation to the wife and mother. Where principle does not enter into a tie which is the most sacred . . . "

"Oh, fol de rol!" said Mrs. Hatch.

"Why! why! Mary!"

"I say 'fol de rol!'" said Mrs. Hatch. "To be a

wife and mother is all very well; but one must be one's self first."

"Oh, of course, if you can joke about it I have nothing further to say. We have felt the deepest sympathy, but I imagine it is misplaced."

"Who is joking? Any one would suppose, from the way you talk, that our Muriel was a lost girl. She has some individuality, that is true."

Cousin Martha again closed her eyes. It seemed this time as if her lids would never rise again.

"I heard that Dr. Prendergast,—of course I had heard that—— Dear me, Mary! how shocking!"

"*What* is so shocking?"

"Why, why, the things you accuse me of, and your ideas of marriage too. I must say, Mary, you and I don't agree on these matters."

"It is not necessary that we should."

"These Englishmen are so fond of sport, of pleasures in which a truly feminine woman cannot join."

"Fond of pleasure? Well, if he wants pleasure I hope my son-in-law will get it. There's nothing so good for the digestion."

"You laugh at everything. To me there is nothing more beautiful than a union entered into with proper seriousness: two persons going down the hill of life together, with *mutual* interests, hand in hand . . . "

"Really! To me married middle life always looks a little bit bleak. I tell Hatch it is almost time we were not seen so much together. He is always for hanging to my skirts. When one begins to roll down a hill, don't you think, Martha, it's better to take opposite sides? It gives one more breathing-space."

The lady addressed pursed her lip. "Oh, of course, if you refuse to be in earnest . . ."

"Never was more so in my life. I am thinking of dividing the children into parts and making Hatch a present of the half of them. I'll take the little ones. They're less trouble for an old woman. What does a man want an ugly old woman about for?"

"What's this you are discussing?" inquired Mr. Hatch, looming in.

He came over and kissed his wife's fingers. "Take her away," she managed to whisper to him.

Mr. Hatch contrived to patch up some kind of a truce. He suggested that they should adjourn under the trees. The tea was there already getting cold. May-Margaret perched upon the wall, and by her side sat Mr. Parachute. The blue evening was in her hair, paling its gold; her features had taken on tints milky as alabaster. Under her feet was the lapping water. The wavelets shimmered limpidly through their mosses' fringe of tangled verdure, like gentle eyes beneath trembling lashes. They made a delicious symphony, soft as a refrain of the langue d'Oyl:

> Ceste est la belle Aliz;
> Ceste est la flur, ceste est le lis.

May-Margaret was devouring a piece of cake, eating as prettily as Madame Eglantine. A bird overhead was executing a foolish trill in the flame of the dying day. A last sun-ray fell on the girl's forehead; the night lay beneath her eyelids. Her breath was as sweet as the spring woods. She was a beautiful pagan image of health and youth, one of those maidens who, one felt, might develop into a woman of exquisite caresses and redoubtable angers.

The Hatch girls were not "plain sailing." This was positive. It was borne in upon the young priest

thirsting for sacrifice, for ascetic renunciation, for great and transcendent aims, upon his fervent soul whose only bride should have been the altar. Yet this mystery of feminine loveliness—was it forever to remain a mystery to him? Should he never quaff it, make it his?—never? never? There stirred within him that vague longing to taste of that double existence, of that new thing, so full of doubts, of dangers, of suspicions, yet also of ineffable sweetness and pardons. Yet he would not for the world have touched her hand.

And that other maiden, pretty but prim, who had "slummed" with him, had awakened not one of these dreams and these fantasies. When she had left him he had been cold: why? May-Margaret sitting on her stone wall, eating her cake, and declaring that she hated slumming and never went into the poor man's cot, seemed to him far more alluring.

Having finished her cake, she fell again to pulling Layamon's tail, which seemed her favorite pastime of a summer's afternoon, but she did it with so much vivacity and elegance that the young clergyman was convinced that even a dog's tail might be pulled to some purpose.

Mr. Hatch, under the influence of his tea, was discoursing genially: "Of course high virtues are the most natural sources of our admiration. Yet all grandeur arrests us. The splendid conqueror, even the daring conspirator, of whom we do not approve, charms and holds our imagination. What one reveres is force, contempt of public opinion, of selfish interest, of danger, of death."

Here Crummy and a large boulder became detached from the top of the wall and fell twelve feet into the water. There was a cataclysm. Crummy yelled, strug-

gled, righted himself, and was extricated by Mr. Parachute, with the aid of an opportune fish-pole. He came up riding the pole with a hurrah, covered with black mud-slime, and had to be immediately banished, not before, however, he had enthusiastically kissed his mother's cheek and left his mark upon its edge. He left his mark, indeed, all the way up the stairs.

"What appeals to the imagination," said Mr. Parachute, "is, of course, not only beauty and grandeur in action, but all novelty."

> "I care not for feature, I'm sure to discover
> Some exquisite trait in each new one you send;
> But the fondness wears off as the novelty's over:
> I want a new face for an intimate friend,"

hummed May-Margaret.

"Ah! strength! strength! That's what one craves now in art, in literature," continued Mr. Hatch, following his train of thought,—"another cup of tea, dearest, —that is what the world asks to-day! And the public is, after all, the supreme judge to which our last plea must be taken."

"Surely the public itself is often very perverted," ventured Mrs. Titus.

"The public has a lot of common sense," said Mrs. Hatch, "and that must always be applied to a judgment even of the arts. When I say the public I mean the intelligent people: I don't mean the mob which howls and pelts what it cannot understand."

"But surely their taste must be elevated, educated?"

"I don't know. Yes, perhaps, but not too highly. The hypercritical are so tiresome. You talk of strength, dear," said Mrs. Hatch, turning to her husband, "but strength of fist, which used to make a reputation for

chivalry, methinks nowadays would only lead a man to the gallows."

"What do you call taste, Mr. Hatch?" asked Mr. Parachute.

"Why, of course, the power of judgment. Genius alone executes. How few have either! To touch the heart; that is alone the secret of the applause of a large public. There is nothing like the crude but vivifying efflux of the multitude. I call it the essence of humanity. I like that large heartiness whose savor we breathe only in the crowd."

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Hatch, "that is the secret which pleases all ages: kinship of the heart."

The clergyman's confused revery kept up its undercurrent through the superficial converse. It struck a diapason whose tones and semi-tones were full of puzzling thoughts, arresting problems,—and May-Margaret so sweetly near!

"And to think," mused Cousin Martha, "that I came here to condole with these people!"

She got herself up at last, humiliated . . . for them. Frivolous they were, disgustingly so. As to Mr. Parachute, she would not have believed him capable of such reprehensible waste of time, had she not seen it with her own eyes. Driving away, she felt half inclined to go back and warn him. Of what? And here her horses shied, and so she did not formulate her counsel.

He watched the retreating wheels and the flying leaves behind them, and almost wished that he might follow them into their exile of safety.

There was something pathetic about his black figure against the twilight. May-Margaret knew that he was a lonely fellow. He had lately lost his mother. He had no one to care for him, no one. He had been telling

her about it before the others came, and she had fallen somehow to pitying him. Pity! Divine sister of Love, which no soul knoweth that cannot also love and console!

VIII.

MRS. LARREMORE sat in her boudoir the following winter with her feet towards the andirons, her eyes on her own fair reflection in a low mirror opposite. She wore a garment of pale satin, bound about the hips like a touloupe, and opening upon floods of light palpitant laces. She held in her hand a sheet of paper and a pencil. Near her, in voiceless and contemplative ecstasy, sat a young woman to whom she had lately accorded her friendship and patronage, and whose present extreme happiness may have sprung from the insecurity of Mrs. Larremore's affections. So insecure did she feel, indeed, that her very laughter had as it were the humidity of a tear in it. For who knew at what turn of Fortune's wheel this lady's fickle fancy might play her new friend a trick and hurl her back into oblivion? Mrs. Larremore had called in young Mrs. Crawford to assist her in making a list for an impending "function." It is needless to explain that Mrs. Crawford was a social aspirant.

Mrs. Larremore was herself five—nay, let us be generous and say eight years old. Eight years ago she had herself been very "new," but she was a precocious child and made strides with phenomenal rapidity. Her one day had been, as it were, the Biblical thousand years. She was very handsome, well dressed, extremely amusing, fairly good-natured, and had cart-loads of money. She was not distinguished, but, as she herself would have asked, who is? The number to which this

descriptive adjective may be applied does not, in fact, multiply and cover the earth. Mrs. Larremore, nevertheless, had a keen appreciation of distinguished people and their desirability, and managed to gather such as were feasible and possible at her house. Unlike the generality of persons who have risen, she was genial rather than snobbish, and had no especial desire to push and kick down those who were making their very painful and breathless ascent,—that ascent upon the upper rung where she sat so proudly secure. That she had "arrived," not even her most malignant detractors could deny.

To-day she had sent for little Mrs. Crawford, first because she lived near her and was easily get-at-able, and secondly because she liked her. It was possibly one of the secrets of her success that she had dared to have preferences; and now that she could impose upon and impress others it insured a certain solidity to her own position. There is a degree of suppleness which must be deprecated in vertebrated animals. With all Mrs. Larremore's faults,—and she had a colossal share,—she had a streak of stubborn honesty. She had been too honest to discard all of her old friends, and had actually pulled one or two up after her. Of course these had been such as would and did help themselves. "Lumps" and "frumps" who would not lend themselves to being assisted had of course to be left to their fate. If people prefer to wallow they must be left to their wallowing. Mrs. Larremore's shoulders were strong, but she could not carry the whole world on them. On the whole, she had been amiable.

Mrs. Larremore generally had a mild love-affair—it were better to call it a robust flirtation—in progress, and during the process of this personal enchantment,

which absorbed a certain amount of her superabundant vitality, she was apt to be peculiarly kindly. She even drove out an ugly girl or two in her victoria or her sleigh, and had once been known to ask a country clergyman's widow to dinner. These heart-affairs, as she grew older, were more violent at the commencement, but less sustained. After thirty the emotions are far stronger than in youth, but less patient. There is not the time. In fact, when her new admirer, whoever he might be, had seen her in her charming house at its best, found her reclining in an attitude of studied discomfort under a rose-bush by a shaded lamp in her dim drawing-room, after she had dazzled him in most of her gowns, after he had leaned over her white shoulder at the opera or held her hand a moment in the cold, unmagnetic contact of the dance, she generally grew very tired of him, and liked him only when others were present. Nothing is so distressing as a *tête-à-tête* in which there lingers the vague promise of a tenderness whose claims shall remain forever unfulfilled.

At such times, as I have said, she was good-natured. Probably on the whole she was not much worse than her neighbors, and there was no great harm in her. When she was disengaged, however, from all heart-entanglements she was apt to be rather cross. Fortunately for her husband and her children, the occasions had been rare. Her husband, who was never cross, adored her, in his way,—an adoration without jealousy and without reproach, mild, possible, and lenient. He was a clever man of business, and was very fond of sport, to which he was addicted—within limits. He was reputed to be indifferent to all women except his wife, his two passions being his business career and

fishing. He angled for trout, and she for men. The difference, after all, is insignificant. Both fish are easy to kill when one has time.

Of Mrs. Crawford it may be said that she was one of those young married women whom other women call "sweet." This means a person devoid of all dazzling allurement either of mind or of person,—an immense advantage in the social struggle. To rouse no rivalries is to be acceptable. She had a splendid ball-room, just re-decorated for the fourth time. Mr. Crawford, a little thin man with a head the size of a fall pippin and with a chronic cold in it,—owing perhaps to the fact that the painters were always in his house, and the windows wide open,—had a great desire to assist her in piping, if only dancers could be forthcoming; nay, they were both delirious pipers; and yet so far there had been but scant waltzing to their music. Mr. and Mrs. Crawford lacked a certain amount of push and social talent to meet the exigencies of their situation. Mrs. Larremore had decided that she must herself give out from her overflowing cruse into her neighbors' empty cup. Their advantages made it worth while. Now the two ladies were engaged in making a list for a ball.

"They are of an excellent family," said Mrs. Crawford, whose leisure moments for the last two years had been passed in studying genealogies.

"Bosh! Fiddle-faddle! Who cares for family?"

"I thought . . . "

"My dear, you are not called upon to think. I *know*. Trust me."

"Mrs. Lawrence told me Mrs. Hyatt Titus was very well born . . . "

"She's a horrid bore: that's what she is; and so is the old man. But the girl's nice-looking; therefore,

here goes! Besides, she's a cousin to Lady Brownlow, and Muriel's the rage."

"Ah! Lady Brownlow,—is she here?"

"Yes, just on the wing. They sail the next day. Have you met her?"

"No. I passed her in driving."

"My dear, you must do more than that. That won't suffice. She would help you immensely in London next spring; and then 'Brownie' is such a dear!"

Mrs. Crawford's eyes sparkled with excitement. Her gloved fingers closed convulsively over her little thumbs.

"What can I do? Could I leave a card?"

"We'll go there, if you like, this afternoon. She's stopping at the Lawrences'. She's very nice," said Mrs. Larremore, nonchalantly.

"How lovely you are, and kind to me! Why is it?"

"I like you."

"I wonder why!"

"You are not aggressive."

"I have sometimes thought that was my misfortune."

"It is, in a way."

"I can't fight."

"Yes, I know. It's slower, but I've sometimes thought in the end it was safer. It's so easy to come down, to get a cropper."

"I wouldn't like to come down."

"Well, my dear, I'll attend to that. But the fact is you must go up first. I like you because you never interfere with my methods. A cleverer woman must always have her say, her opinions, her ideas, and spoils everything by insisting on having her finger in her own pie. In a handsomer one vanity is always on the alert; takes umbrage and offence at nothing; has to be fussed

over and coddled at every turn. It is complicating, exasperating, and tiresome. You're sweet, and that's just what we want."

Mrs. Crawford accepted Mrs. Larremore's frankness without wincing. In these stormy crises of fate trifles are put aside ; there is no use in grimacing.

"Of course you'll wear white," said Cousin Martha to her *débutante*,—they were now settled in their city home for the winter,—"white, with clover-blossoms ; that has always been my idea for a first party. I hope, my child, you will not allow the atmosphere of worldly pleasure and emulation to turn your head or enervate your intellect."

"I hope not, mamma."

"I did not much fancy that Mrs. Larremore. Her influence might be, I think, a pernicious one upon very young people. Your papa considers her intelligent . . . "

"She does not take the trouble to be pernicious. She's thinking of herself."

"Of her husband and her children, I hope, and of making their home happy."

Her daughter laughed, but said nothing. She had given up explaining things to her mamma ; she was dimly beginning to unravel them for herself. It is a curious experience when a child first perceives the feebleness of perception or judgment in a parent.

The drive to the ball was somewhat constrained. Mr. Hyatt Titus's lavender gloves and white choker seemed too much for his content. Mrs. Hyatt Titus had discovered at the last moment, to her great dismay, that the body of her gown was . . . immodest. Five layers torn hurriedly from a white lace flounce had been care-

fully pushed in and pinned across a bust upon which no evil eye should peer with wicked intent. Her heels were higher than she usually wore, and she had stood about upon them so long during this readjustment, this tribute laid upon the altar of long-proved and spotless conduct, that she had a cramp in her left foot which caused her now and then to emit a muffled cry of agony.

The younger aspirant to social preferment was so agitated that a nervous irritability possessed her. She was thinking of her coming triumphs, which seemed to render peculiarly tame the progress of the carriage through the slippery streets. A frantic unrest filled her.

"Promise me," said her mother, "that you will not dance every dance. Your cousin Mary, who was very foolish when she was young, once contracted a bad congestion from overheating herself in this way and then standing near a window."

"Oh, let her dance," said the father. "Why, bless me, didn't you go to dancing-school, my dear?"

"Perhaps no one will ask me," said Miss Highty Tighty, coyly, trying to catch a glimpse of herself in the square of the window-pane. "Cousin Mary said I ought to have been presented at home first."

"Mrs. Larremore will, of course, attend to the young girls getting partners," said this unsophisticated mother, "and your dress is *most* becoming."

The dressing-room presented to our ladies a sea of faces which were principally strange ones. Miss Hyatt Titus's gown seemed somehow suddenly to shrink upon her, to become a little too scant in the back, and her mother noticed in sudden alarm that there was a sad crease in the sash-ribbon. It was, nevertheless, fresh

and pretty, and she looked charming. So said Lady Brownlow to her an hour later as she swept past the trio, whose fear of being overheated seemed to have been effectually chilled.

They were huddled together in one of the door-ways when Lady Brownlow passed, herself a radiant vision, with a rose at her girdle and a diamond star in her hair. She was gentleness itself to her cousins, bending for a moment from out the rich prestige of her own effulgent glory, without one shade of superiority in either her manner or her speech. She was full of life's new wine, bubbling over in graciousness.

She found her little cousin laughing a great deal in a sort of forced way, looking about her tremblingly as she detained a youth very young, very slender, and with a muddy complexion, by a hand slipped through his crooked arm-sleeve. His mere presence seemed to have galvanized the girl into a febrile gayety. He was, in fact, her first partner. She was beginning to fear that he would be the last. At the moment Lady Brownlow addressed her she was trying to induce him to offer his services for supper. There was a distant murmur that this terrible ordeal was at hand. The cotillon was to follow, and our little *débutante* was not engaged for either. She did at last persuade her youth to take her down. They joined her father and mother and a literary couple, a certain Mr. Pickabone and his wife, a man and woman distinguished from the environing crowd by a strange unfitness in the matter of costume. The gentleman's hair was long and the lady's short. Mrs. Pickabone wore a scant sky-blue brocade cut high over the shoulders, but whose V-shaped aperture was zig-zagged by ten yards of ascending cotton laces. A safety-pin held these across a defiant collar-bone as if

to defend a siege ; while a large bunch of natural smilax served as an abatis. Around her thin, dark throat, which had the look of a moulting parrot's, was fastened a necklace of cockle-shells set in silver.

In the general *mêlée* poor Mr. Titus carried in this gaunt lady, while his wife brought up the rear with the author, her husband. They found a table behind a door, and here were served to them the same delicate viands and wines which the more fortunate were consuming.

"John Salisbury's chief work, my dear," said the *littérateur*, helping his wife to a glass of claret, "is a treatise, in eight books, on the frivolities of courtiers and the footsteps of philosophers. This scene and its heterogeneous assemblage remind me of the interesting medley I was perusing this morning. Here we meet all,—all in one."

"Who are those guys?" whispered Mrs. Larremore as she passed in, upon a distinguished foreigner's arm, among her guests.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Mr. Larremore. "How on earth can I tell? I didn't see your list. I don't know half the people here."

"Oh, I remember now. It must be the man the Gallaways asked for ; that man who lived in Samoa, and writes about it. I had to send them a card to please Aunt Kate. Who would imagine the wife would come too? She's quite dreadful. That's all one gets for being unselfish."

The advent of a fair divorcée, whom she knew by sight, at an adjoining table caused the Samoan lady to break forth in lamentations at the present looseness of the marriage tie.

"Marriage is the force, the order, of life,—its health

and dignity. What, will you tell me, are we coming to, if men are to be so easily released from their obligations?" she said, shaking her head until the smilax and cockle-shells trembled.

"I," said the Samoan, "I, for one, am of Ingersoll's way of thinking. I would make our divorce laws even easier than they are. Old prejudices must not paralyze progress—Terrapin, my love?—Now, in Samoa, Mr. Hyatt Titus, you have no idea what strange views they hold about marriage." And he went on with great prolixity giving these views, which were certainly astounding.

Miss Hyatt Titus passed the hour of the cotillon in the dressing-room. When her mother came later to her bedchamber to assist her in disrobing, she found the little girl lying sobbing on the floor, whose hardness was not more cruel than that of the world which had ignored her. She rolled over and looked up at her mother's frightened face.

"Why didn't you know," she said, angrily, "what I had to expect, mamma? Older people ought to know about these things. I never danced once; and then to sup with those queer, horrid-looking people! It was too humiliating! As to Mrs. Larremore, she never noticed my existence."

Poor Mrs. H. T. wrung her hands, feeling for the first time that the duties of a wife and mother were greater than she could perform.

"That pretty girl from the lake seemed to have rather a heavy time, my dear," said Mr. Larremore to his wife.

Their splendid rooms presented the curious appearance of a wind-swept desert which follows the last steps

of departing guests. The candles hugged their sockets, now and then giving forth a snapping sound when a lump of falling wax dropped to the parquet floor. This was strewn here and there with straggling débris of tulle, the wrenched-off bit of a lace *balayeuse*, a scrap of gauze from the blue or rosy cloud which had enveloped some dancing nymph. The flowers drooped from mantels and chandeliers, giving forth an almost sickly odor from their hot, crushed petals. The potted plants, stronger to resist the demands of an exhausted atmosphere, stood out dank and dark against the light green of damask panellings. Through the loopings of a dozen portières could be seen now and then the aproned form of one of the under-men hurrying to uncharge the rich banqueting-table in the distant dining-room of its salads, wines, and fruits.

The click of the rattling glasses or the crack of a dropped plate, accompanied by the rather thickly uttered anathema of the head butler,—whom copious draughts of champagne had rendered peculiarly unrelenting,—came muffled through the heavy curtains. In the overhanging gallery the sleepy musicians were putting their instruments to bed in pantalettes and shirts of chamois leather, and the occasional squeak of a recalcitrant fiddle struck back sharply on the silence of the empty halls. Their dark bearded faces peered down through the white and gold balustrade at the master and mistress of the mansion, who were flitting about in broadcloth and satin, with that restless sleeplessness of the host and hostess after a crowded and successful entertainment.

Mrs. Arthur Crawford stopped at the door, half-hidden in her voluminous fawn-colored plush coat, from whose fox-furs emerged her fair head and white throat, like a

Dresden-china umbrella-handle. She lingered for a moment to say good-by on the stairs to a long-necked, faded dude who was flitting before her, in a vain search for his fur-lined coat and silk neck-scarf, which some other gentleman had carried off, leaving in their stead a pair of soiled galoshes and a torn handkerchief.

"What girl, from what lake?" Mrs. Larremore was asking her husband, standing before a Louis XVI. mirror, and arranging her pearl coronet, which had fallen a little awry.

"Why, that girl from the lake—pshaw! you know. I think you should have done something for her."

"Oh, her mother ought to have introduced her properly," said little Mrs. Crawford at the door-way, "before she ventured into the big world. I know from my own experience how cruel and cold it can be." She could afford to be frank now, her own evening having been a wild success.

"What do you think I ought to have done, Larrie?"

"Introduced some men to her."

"My dear, you can bring horses to the trough, but you cannot make them drink. That girl is doomed socially. I knew it from the first. I knew it would be futile, so I just gave it up."

"She is mighty good-looking," said Mr. Larremore.

"Yes, at home, in the morning, in the country. Not in a ball-room. She makes no effect; and then she has no magnetism."

"How can you tell?"

"I can see it in a woman two blocks off, when she is going along the street. I take a man's view."

"Her mother should have given a tea," ventured Mrs. Crawford, tentatively. "I did feel for them."

"A tea! Eleanor, are you insane! Why, don't

you know that a tea will swamp any girl now, unless she is a tearing beauty, or has at least been jilted once by a foreign nobleman? Twenty-two teas wouldn't put that little girl on her legs. I doubt if even a small dance, which is her only hope now, would help her much. I saw her supping with those creatures from Samoa. She had better take to literature. There is a wide field, which requires no teas, no dances, no men, no gowns: such things are superfluous there. In that life there must be peace."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Larremore. "There is nothing of the kind. The jealousies of artists are proverbially more bitter and more acrimonious than those of rival belles."

"I wonder why it is," said Mrs. Larremore, "that those literary people make such guys of themselves." She spoke of the genus as if it had been a species of ape.

"The only literary people I ever met," said Mrs. Crawford, "instead of talking to me of their work, or of their higher aspirations, were trying to impress me with the fact, all the time, that they were in the 'smart set,' or could be if they chose,—that they once had dined with you, dear Mrs. Larremore, or had been entertained at your step-mother's sister's cousin's aunt's. I confess I was surprised, because, with it all, they affected immense contempt for mundane matters, which they said were most frivolous and belittling."

Mrs. Larremore yawned. "The race of fools is not yet extinct, and it is not confined, I find, to any particular orbit. But when those Pickabones get invited here again they'll know it. They had better do all their bragging before my next affair."

IX.

When Miss Highty Tighty rose from her reclining attitude she went to her desk, sat down before it, and began to compose a sonnet. It was called "A World's Blindness."

She wrapped it carefully in tissue-paper, the next morning, tied it between two pieces of cardboard torn from an old ribbon-box, fastened it together with a scrap of pink lutestring, and directed it to the editor of a well-known magazine. As she tied it up she said to herself, "Genius!" Her fingers trembled with excitement, and two crimson spots burned on her soft cheeks. She wrote a line, giving her own name and address, begging that a speedy acknowledgment of this contribution to contemporaneous literature be sent to her. She also requested to be furnished with a detailed analysis of its merits and its chances of speedy publication, and inquired, in a postscript, whether she ought to write on ruled paper. She said to herself that she was conferring a favor. She would stoop to no chicanery: all she desired was to soar. A special messenger boy was charged with this precious package; and Violet entered, a few hours after his departure, into a condition of anxiety that every footfall and every ring of the bell increased almost to agony. The blind and cruel world which had failed to recognize her power would now, she told herself, be forced to pause at the fulminations of her contempt. She saw herself a gifted author raised to a pinnacle of fame, in a province where even her successful cousins would be forced to own themselves beaten. She decided, however,—as it were, in parenthesis,—to avoid smilax and cockle-shells in the matter of personal adornment, and already began

to plan a fitting costume in which she would arise to dazzle the universe.

It was not until the fourth day that she received by mail an official envelope, bearing on the outside the name, in large red letters on a dark disk, of the magazine she had addressed. She was entertaining a girl friend at the time that this missive was placed in her hands, and, finding her visitor inclined to a lingering loquacity, dismissed her with a mysterious shake of her pretty head.

"My dear Jane," she said, "I must ask you to leave me. Some day I will tell you all,—all. To-day I may not speak to you, I may not explain."

Jane was greatly impressed. She scented a love-affair, which must be allowed to take its course if its future was to be piquant, and, hurrying into her black fur cape, got down into the street. The author, released, flew two steps at a time up to her rose-colored bedroom, closed the door, pulled the bolt, and sank panting into her chair. She felt disappointed to find the letter extremely brief, written in type, and signed by some illegible, unreadable person, evidently not the editor. It simply stated that her note and package had reached their destination and would receive respectful attention.

Eight days of extravagant hopes and fears, of poignant, merciless expectancy, had to be lived through. Our bright little friend grew pallid and languid, dragged her limbs wearily, and lost her appetite. She hung from the window or flew into the antechamber every time the postman's whistle broke the monotony of the well-ordered household. She refused two girls'-luncheon-parties, and positively declined to take the slightest interest in an entertainment her mother timidly

suggested giving for her,—receiving the proposition with the silent shrug of one who has long since done with such small things.

On the eighth day she called her maid Josephine, donned a becoming hat and coat, and despatched Buttons furtively for a cab,—her mother was out shopping in the brougham,—gave the cabman, in a voice of suppressed agitation, the address of the tardy editor, and was soon on the way to his lair.

She told her maid her errand; she was dying for a confidante.

"You're so rich, miss," Josephine said to her, "I don't see why you should be bothered with writing. Them as is poor ought to write the books."

"Rich!" Miss Highty Tighty's eyes rolled to the cab's horizon. "Rich! I write for fame, Josephine."

"Well, I guess it ain't wuth it," said Josephine.

"Oh, of course *you* cannot comprehend," leaning back with a sigh.

"Well, miss, if I was rich I guess I'd take it easy."

"I am afraid yours is a sordid soul, Josephine. What would you do if you had money, pray?"

"I've got no friends except my mother, miss, and God Almighty," said Josephine, quite cheerfully, evidently thinking "sordid" meant something flattering, "and I guess if I was rich I'd have a plenty of them. I'd buy the little cottage down by the East Lake, miss, for my mother, so she could have a place of her own, and I'd put my sister Maggie with her; she's kind of sickly to work hard as she's doin'." Thus Josephine's sordidness declared itself.

At this moment they arrived. Violet entered the large book-shop which faced the street with that same mysterious, swift, almost guilty movement with which

she had impressed her friend Jane on a previous occasion. Josephine, in a gray ulster and brown bonnet, brought up the rear. The young mistress attracted that mild form of attention which is accorded to feminine charm by the weary and harassed clerk of a fashionable shop. Pretty girls were not rare, and their entrance aroused little curiosity or excitement. Nevertheless a red-headed youth left abruptly a wearisome old gentleman who was fumbling querulously over some volumes, and accosted her with a certain degree of alacrity.

"Can I show you anything, miss? New novels, eh? Here is 'The Acrobat's Inquiry,' the great success of the season, by a society woman, Mrs. Plum, of Louisville, Kentucky."

"Thank you," said Miss Hyatt Titus, loftily. "I desire to see Mr. Carper, the editor, in person, on special business. Is he here, and at liberty?"

The clerk stared, surprised. "Certainly, miss. Step this way."

"Josephine," with a wave of her hand, "follow me."

Josephine followed with round eyes. They were ushered between the book-laden counters, through a gloomy passage, into a long, narrow room fitted with a table and two sofas. Upon its walls were hung a variety of sketches and photographs, apparently portraits of authors, signed in bold autographs. Some of them were large and conspicuous, and represented well-known women writers. One or two of these ladies wore low-necked gowns, had assumed poses of more or less picturesqueness, and looked out with intellectual challenge from under masses of shaggy or frizzled hair.

Josephine sank resigned into a chair near the door,

and it was during this mute contemplation that a panel was pushed away with a jerk, and a man's head emerged from a neighboring room. After peering in cautiously for a few seconds, he stepped across the threshold. He seemed to be about thirty, and was distinctly handsome. He wore a suit of gray rough morning cloth, was a six-footer, broad in the chest, robust, and carried himself more like an English sportsman than like a *littérateur*.

"How do you do?" he said, a trifle awkwardly.

"I came to see you on . . . on . . . business," said Miss Highty Tighty. "Are you the . . . er . . . editor?"

"I am Mr. Carper. Won't you sit down?"

She sat down. Her throat felt a little dry. "I sent a poem—a sonnet—here, some days since," she said, "but they don't write me about it. I don't seem to hear anything."

"Ah! What was its name?" he asked, looking with evident admiration at the fair girl before him. He seated himself near the table, crossing his legs, and toying carelessly with a paper-knife which lay under his hand.

She gave her name and that of her performance.

"I think you are mistaken," he replied, still staring at her admiringly. "There hasn't been any such poem sent here. It hasn't come under my notice. To be sure, I only landed from Europe last night, so that I don't know very much about it."

"Who does know, then?" asked the girl, her eyes filling with angry tears, and not without a slight asperity of voice. "Some one wrote me it had been received. Would they have thrown it away?" she asked, with quivering lips.

"Oh, dear, no! of course not! You understand we can't always send back rejected pieces. We couldn't undertake it, don't you know?" His smile jarred upon her nerves. "Here, French, come in here. Here's a lady has sent a sonnet—— Ah! you are looking up at Mrs. Plum's portrait, I see! Wonderful, that woman! Two hundred thousand copies of her 'Acrobat,' and the sale still booming. Whew! There's a book for you! I don't know as we'll ever get another like it. She's a jewel, Mrs. Plum, but she's a little devil, too, I tell you! Why don't you write a novel, instead of wasting your time on sonnets? They don't pay, anyway. Ha! ha!" And he laughed.

She didn't say to him, as she had to the maid, that she wrote for fame. Fame seemed just then a fickle goddess, and this man's hopeless commonplace was not the lost key to her inconstant favor.

Mr. French now came in. He was a short, spare person, with a shock of yellow hair, which stood up in waves from a high, pale forehead. He threw the lapels of his coat back, as he entered, with the back of his thumbs, jauntily, and stuck his tongue into his left cheek.

"I am the author of 'A World's Blindness.' I have come to learn if it will suit you for the magazine," said Miss Hyatt Titus, rising proudly, with head erect and quivering nostril, but with a heart of lead and cold, shaking fingers.

With a spasmodic, nervous movement the short man looked helplessly at Mr. Carper and remained speechless.

"Did you read it, French, eh?" asked the latter, smothering an evidently continued inclination to hilarity under a stern frown and severe voice.

French scratched his head. "Ye-e-e-s," he said, "I read it. I remember it."

"Well?" said the girl, eagerly.

"Well," said Mr. French, "you see, miss, our magazine's made up for a couple of years or more ahead. By the time your poem came round, the public demand for sonnets—never very pronounced—might be . . . er . . . as it were in abeyance. So that . . . so that . . . we wouldn't like to pledge ourselves to anything." He looked helplessly at Mr. Carper; but this gentleman refused to come to his rescue, and continued to glare and frown, keeping his left eye fixed meanwhile upon the profile of Mrs. Plum—which swung upon its nail above him—as upon an ægis of safety and of refuge. His attention seemed to be wavering.

He took up a volume. "Do you know Larkins? eh? and his work? No, I presume *not*. That man's pluck!—Well! publishes a novel yearly; pays for the plates himself; falls dead as a door-nail; goes straight on. We're about sick of it; but you can't stop him; he's wound up as tight as a kite. Seems as if he had no sense, ha! ha!"

"Of course," said Mr. French, now a trifle impatient, "if Mr. Carper says so, your . . . er . . . poetry can go into the magazine to-morrow. Something else can be thrown overboard. It all rests with our editor. It's all one to me." But Miss Hyatt Titus had risen and was making for the door. "You can return it to me," she fulminated, sweeping by Josephine with a glance whose warning caused this young woman to start to her feet like a Chinese mandarin from its spring toy-box.

A rustle of garments made her look up as she tripped across the corridor, followed by her maid. A tall person, with a crushed-strawberry scarf wound about her

serpentine figure, came quickly forward from some dark embrasure, and, throwing her attenuated arms about Violet, saluted her fervently. "Dearest Cynthia!" she cried.

"But I am not Cynthia."

"Ah, you cannot deceive me," said the tall lady, shaking her mane. "The author of 'A Woman's Wail' has found repose, nay, shelter, on this breast!" and our would-be poet was again pressed with violence against a wish-bone of peculiar sharpness. "Such talent, such fire, pathos, passion . . . oh!" cried the female editress in a fine rhapsody.

"But you are mistaken."

A ray of light pierced the gloom as Mr. French's retreating figure was absorbed into a back office. "Bless me!" said the lady, winking a pair of small, deep-set eyes, and waking from her frenzy. "I was expecting Cynthia. I'm sure I beg your pardon miss."

X.

In the spring there was another wedding in the Hatch household. This time it was no runaway, like Muriel's, no mending of a lacerated heart, like Willie Truden's compromise with Audrey; but two bright and ardent young souls, with the parental blessing and the world's approval, stepped forth together, fresh to their new existence. For some occult reason best known to herself, the fair May-Margaret, who was nothing if not wayward, developed a pronounced desire for a spice of the world's frivolity, as well as of its sanction, at her nuptials. She made an extensive list of the people she wished invited, sitting on the floor at her mother's feet. And first and foremost upon this list were the names of

Mrs. Larremore, of the Arthur Crawfords, and of a lot of people whom she knew at best but very little, and her reverend adorer not at all.

"If he thinks I am going to mope because I marry a clergyman," she said to her mother, "I had better get him out of that idea at once. I intend to make him a bishop, and these people may be important. This is the first step. We'll have to give dinner-parties when he is a bishop, and he's got to learn now."

To all of this the Rev. Parachute, when he was admitted to the conclave, listened in frightened ecstasy. It was evident that May-Margaret was ambitious. He told himself that there were flowers, like the giroflée, meant to climb, and whose calyx only reached perfection when leaning over the abyss. The sons of God were ever prone to see the daughters of men, that they were fair.

A delicious ravishment robbed him of speech. Sometimes at night, kneeling before his crucifix, he implored forgiveness for this deadly sin of loving one of God's creatures overmuch. He prayed that it might not be imputed as sin for him to have chosen as his cherished companion one who was so full of earthly fascination. He felt sure—oh, so sure !—that she was also good and gentle.

Mrs. Larremore, whose winter had on the whole bored her,—she almost wished there were fresh ladders to mount: what blissful days those of the breathless ascent !—and Mrs. Arthur Crawford, who was in excellent spirits because of her own attainment, volunteered to chaperon a party of young people up from town. They thought it would be amusing.

Lady Brownlow, who had crossed the seas expressly, had arrived at the lake the day before, accompanied by

her husband, a couple of handsome Englishmen, two maids, a valet, and twenty-seven boxes. These gallant Britishers, with a neighbor or two, and a dude from the city, were impressed into the service as ushers, preceded by Crummy in a starched ruff and a little Henry III. blue velvet jacket, made out of his mother's first married ball-gown. Crummy was omnipresent, under everybody's feet, still freckled, still troublesome, still noisy, but clean for once, and bursting with importance.

Lucille and Lillian Hatch, the twins, pretty, flower-like creatures of sixteen summers, were to be bride-maidens, with two other girls, one of whom was imported from a distant town, to represent the Parachute clan. And then, besides these, there was our poet. She had never been invited to be a bridesmaid before, and even æsthetic and literary young women are human. She was pleased. She expressed herself, however, condescendingly, alluding to the fact that, having entered the field of literature,—how Mrs. Hatch laughed!—her time was not now fully at her own command.

The fact was, Miss Hyatt Titus, after nursing for two months her baffled ambition with thoughts of revenge, had once more taken up the pen. This time she had been practical. She had taken Mr. Carper's advice. She had done with sonnets. She was writing a novel. Its name was "Novensides." She didn't know what it meant, but she decided to find out when the book was finished. As she had only written a chapter and a half, there seemed to be no immediate haste. She now spoke openly of her literary labors. It sounded well, or at least she thought so; and the smiles and nods of her acquaintances were taken for the expression of astonished admiration. One girl had indeed

been somewhat offensively inquisitive as to what she had already published, and had given vent to a slightly mocking titter when told that the publication of a thing was of little moment, if only there was the talent. This lack of sympathy Miss Hyatt Titus attributed to the jealousy always awakened in small and mediocre breasts by impending success.

She had decided upon at least two characters in her story. One was to be a thinly-veiled Mrs. Larremore, represented as a malignant, malevolent, mischief-brewing being, given over to all manner of wickedness, slyness, and deceit; attractive—within limits—but doomed to ultimate perdition in this planet and the next. The other was a polished villain. She had first intended to portray him as an English duke, who should inveigle into his toils and decoy to her destruction a village maiden. Unfortunately, having imparted this portion of the plot to her friend the mocking girl, this young lady had giggled again, and this time more provokingly. "Why, yes," she had said, "*do!* That would be so new!" And somehow Miss Highty Tighty had suspected the girl's words to convey hidden satire. Could it be possible?

Then when she had essayed to portray the Earl of Brownlow—the nearest approach she knew to an English duke—she found herself embarrassed, Draco, or "Brownie," as Mrs. Larremore called him, was so far from her preconception of the polished villain,—such polished villains as she had seen upon the stage,—gentlemen invariably dressed, whatever the season, in light summer overcoats, high gray silk hats, and diamond scarf-pins. "Why do polished villains always wear a gray silk hat?" she asked herself, pondering, doubting, depressed.

The heroine of "Novensides" was an ethereal, exquisitely dressed, misunderstood by friends and family . . . genius. Her face and figure were described with close minutiæ, described so conclusively to represent —herself, that she grew frightened at the last minute, and threw in a mole under the left ear. She decided she could change the hair later, if the publisher thought it wise. She remembered that Homer only tells us that Achilles was blond, and that somehow we see him, and wondered why this girl, so elaborately detailed, remained elusive, intangible, and unreal. She even had shed a few tears over this. She had grown tired and fretful. She had inked her best frock. Could it be possible that Homer or Achilles or somebody was cleverer than she? But this was only a momentary weakness, such as she had experienced after her first visit to Mr. Carper, when she had felt humbled in spite of herself, and had sighed for wisdom.

Yes, it would be a rest and respite from this arduous career to dance at her cousin May-Margaret's wedding.

What a lovely day it was, to be sure! and how handsome Papa and Mamma Hatch looked, she in her lilac silk and he with his *boutonnière!*

The Rev. Parachute was very pale, as if he had passed a night of vigil, but May-Margaret, who had slept soundly for twelve hours, and had eaten a capital breakfast, was gay and rosy, and seemed to view the whole affair as an immense frolic. She gave her hand a moment shyly to her lover, on the stairs, and blushed under her orange-blossoms at some word he whispered to her of her beauty.

The Countess of Brownlow caused a profound sensation as she swayed up the aisle of the country church, upon the arm of one of the English ushers, in a won-

derfully fitting gown of satin and lace. There was almost as much tremor when Mrs. Larremore, in a cloud of Nile-green chiffon, was whirled half-way to the altar, at the Earl of Brownlow's elbow. Having ensconced his charge in a prominent pew, he left her, lumbering up, with his awkward gait, to join his beautiful wife.

Then afterwards, at the Hatcheries, there was a festive gathering indeed. All were here except the Trudens, who were travelling far away in the Greek Islands and cabled their message of affection across seas, oceans, and archipelagoes.

Even Cousin Martha unbent for the occasion, and was most affable to Mr. Hatch, who buried the hatchet and took her in to breakfast. Mr. Hyatt Titus, who sidled up to Mrs. Larremore with a broiled bird on the end of a fork, and a glass of champagne between his thumb and index, was rewarded by a melting smile. And his daughter drew the ring out of the bridesmaids' cake which was given her by her groomsman. This groomsman was a timid, callow young man, the son of a gentleman reported to own the greater portion of a Western Territory, and a fabulously productive gold-mine. He also had been imported by Mr. Parachute from his far-away province, as being a distant relative. This gilded youth trembled when Miss Hyatt Titus looked at him. He thought her the very embodiment of fashion, elegance, and distinction. The author of "Novensides" wondered if to be understood and deified one must indeed revert to distant and imported worshippers. She wondered if gold-digging in remote regions might not afford solace to a wounded spirit. She dazzled him so completely, before the day had drifted into the twilight and the rice and slippers had

been hurled at the departing Parachutes,—May-Margaret's hat being generously trimmed by a beading of the Mascote grain,—that her own foolish heart fluttered with a longing half assuaged. Her vanity had found aliment at last. She had made her first conquest.

Morning Mists

I.

"COME down for a couple of nights, old man, and we'll have some tennis." So said Bruce, swinging his long, calfless legs from the top of my dining-table, in my new chambers, across the square.

"All right," said I, "I'm yours."

I was very proud of my new rooms, proud of living at last in the metropolis which had long been the El Dorado of my reveries. My college days were over. I felt very important at being admitted in the law office of a great firm, and had distant visions of partnership and of honors. Oh, the brave illusions of the young!

At home I lived in a suburb, a breezy one, far enough from the town to catch a near breath of salt sea smells, a more distant one of sweet-scented meadow-grasses.

The promise now of a day or two in the country was alluring to me. Dimly, nature was pulling at my heart-strings. For, although I looked very commonplace and practical, and affected a certain deliberateness of speech and manner, I had, I think, in these early days, an ardent and dreamy soul. I don't fancy any one else would have imagined it, for my appearance has never been romantic. My mother has always told me I was

very plain. She was herself an elderly person, whose expiring effort of maternity, after many more successful performances, had produced . . . me. But I was well-made enough, and brown and strong; and there was a certain freshness about my mouth and lips that women liked; at least, so they have told me since, but they had not told me then.

My idea of motherhood always presented to me a picture of scrupulous housekeeping, a considerable degree of self-immolation, and an occasional dose of castor-oil. Mothers seemed to me a sort of benevolent, beneficent, care-worn, anxious, foolish race who scolded gently, administered medicines when one was ill, and were to be dealt with kindly and indulgently, and to be deceived as to all minor details of one's experience.

Bruce had invited me before to his paternal acres, but, somehow, I had never gone. We had only been very intimate during our last year in college, when a boat-race won in unison had cemented a nascent liking. As his conversation was always devoted to the merits and demerits of various departments of athletics, he had never entertained me about his home and its inmates. I knew he received letters from a mother who, he once told me, was a "darling old girl," and that he had a step-father and a little half-brother. His own father had died when Bruce was a baby. At twenty the family pipe is soon smoked out and thrown aside, and Bruce was not yet twenty. I was a year his senior. We had both entered college very young.

There were signs of elegance about Bruce which led us to suppose him to be very rich. He spent money liberally, dressed rather extravagantly, and hinted that at twenty-one his supply of funds would be even more

generous. Although not over-bright, he was a good fellow, and a great favorite.

Having accepted his invitation, and been told to put a dress-suit in my valise,—"Mamma is fussy about such things," he had said,—we started up the river together, in the pink glow of a departing sun: *the* river, the only one to us who live in the Middle States.

When our steamer creaked up to its rough pier it was quite dusk. It was early in November. The autumn had been unusually mild. The leaves, not yet fallen from the trees which bordered the road, crowned them with russet and crimson, and cast athwart the steep ascent lengthening shadows. One felt that a storm might rise at any moment, shake them wind-swept from their boughs, and, lo, the winter would have come!

A smart tilbury met us close to the dock. Bruce seized the reins, the liveried groom sprang up behind us, and we were soon bowling up the hill. After a short half-mile, we turned abruptly from the main road into a narrow lane, passed under an embankment, through a stone archway, and entered what seemed to be a species of park.

"This is the big house where my grandmother lives," said Bruce, touching up his horse and pointing with his whip at a great pile of pale marble which rose up from amid sombre evergreen hedges. "And here," he said, a few moments later, as we crunched the gravel in front of a more modest construction, "here is our own house."

It was a low, rambling, old-fashioned cottage, literally covered and smothered in vines and roses. It was long and wide, and looked very attractive to my eyes. A man-servant came out from under the porch to take my valise, and preceded us into the hall, which was narrow

and almost dark. The domestic murmured that he had not expected us quite so early, or he would have lighted the lamps. He raised a heavy curtain which concealed a door-way on the right, and ushered us into a small drawing-room. This in turn opened into two other rooms, affording us a vista which seemed to me one of rare charm. In fact, I can recall nothing more grateful than the sudden change from the gusty chill of the evening outside to the rich warmth and comfort of this cosy apartment.

There mingled, I remember, the fragrance of violets with a pervading smell of wood fire. There was, in fact, a large bowl of these delicate, refined flowers on the table, adding their puissant aroma to my first impressions. A fire of large logs on the hearth crackled brightly. Near it was drawn a small tea-table covered with some rich Oriental embroideries, where the silver kettle was already giving forth a buzzing, hissing sound. This table was illumined by two wax-lights discreetly tempered by silken shades, and their fitful blaze, with that from the hearth, alone lit up an otherwise mysterious gloom.

In a distant boudoir two lamps were veiled in silks and laces, hiding modestly their brilliancy, as a fair woman her charms. Their rays rested upon a variety of objects of artistic grace, vivifying their beauty. The walls were draped in dim stuffs suggestive of a French château of the old régime. The golden frames of a few fine pictures of tender coloring made a glowing background to the bits of antique furniture, rare carvings, bric-à-brac, and bibelots which rose up against their glinting surfaces.

There was such a hush and reposefulness about these fairy-like rooms that Bruce's "Hang on here, old fel-

low ; I'll run up and find the mother," rang harshly on my drugged senses.

"Mrs. Pryor told me to tell you, sir," said the servant, who had returned with some cream and a small plate on which were disposed slices of thin bread-and-butter,—he addressed Bruce,—"that she drove late, and was just dressing, but she would be down in a minute, to make the tea for you and the gentleman ; but that if you wanted it at once, sir, I could make it for you."

"No, I'll run up," said Bruce, and vanished. The servant, after disposing of his trayful, also disappeared, and silence fell again upon the house of Pryor. It was a silence absolute. No, for now and then a log got displaced, and fell forward, emitting a sort of smothered sigh ; while the kettle continued to whiff and puff with intermittent jerks and snorts. Outside, now and then, a riotous vine, whose dim reflection I could vaguely catch through the low curtained window, scratched along the narrow pane.

I buried myself in a deep, low, cushioned chair, close to the grateful heat, crossed my legs, leaned back my head, and gave myself up to pleasant reflection. Its meshes were as confused, as uncertain, as the dimness which environed me. Having so lately attained the freedom of a newly acquired loneliness, the aspiration of my boyhood—independence—in the direction of ambition, there was a momentary lull of thought ; in that of the emotions all was as yet unawakened. There was restlessness,—no more. I was as innocent in sentiment as when the nurse had announced me to the languid curiosity of an eighth *accouchement*, "It's a little boy." My boyhood had been engrossed in manly exercises, out-of-door life, and study ; my college days with feats

of prowess, in which I had won some reputation for skill and strength, and more study. The men liked me, a few with enthusiasm. The girls said I was a "nice sort of a boy," but I noticed that they left me severely alone. I was timid; I dared not molest them much; I feared to be importunate. I have since learned that women resent this form of delicacy. I have tried to make amends.

Well, the kettle was just beginning to steam at the spout, and to promise a speedy inundation, when a light step touched the parquet flooring. I turned and rose to my feet, for a lady had crossed the door-sill. A sudden flare of flame caught her in its embrace, and exhibited her to me, for a moment, in a picture which nothing will ever efface from my memory.

"Is it Mr. Innes?" she asked, in a grave, low voice.

I explained that I was Mr. Innes, and that I was waiting for Mrs. Pryor. I felt vexed with Bruce for not having warned me that there were to be goddesses about. I thought I had left these deities definitively behind me, with my now dusty classics, on my book-shelves. One did not want to find them here again, at once, under one's feet. This was hardly fair. I felt myself grow very hot and very red as the vision begged me, with a nonchalant movement of the hand, to keep my seat. She herself neared the tea-table, and, drawing a tapestried chair close to it, said, "While Mrs. Pryor makes her toilet, suppose we make tea. Do you take sugar and cream? Yes? Well, here!" And she deftly poured out the fragrant drink with splendid jewelled hands, and handed me a cup, and then some bread-and-butter.

She was tall, even very tall, and what one would call a large woman, although there was not an ounce of

superfluous flesh to mar the symmetry of her perfect proportions. There was a sort of force in her movements which held me in a spell of wonder and of pleasure bordering on excitement. Her wealth of dark hair seemed to crown her as with an empress's coronet. Her wide eyes were of a peculiar electric bluish-gray. She was very pale; her pallor, however, did not suggest ill health. It was warm and creamy in hue. Her mouth, which was small, was like a crimson blossom. From her garments, as she moved and talked, there breathed a fragrance as of life and joy. I had not been near her ten minutes, and already the blood from my heart was coursing through my boy's brain and veins with pulsations of a strange exhilaration. Yet her presence caused me a certain anxiety which was almost anguish.

I was so busy noting her personality that I can hardly remember what we talked about. Afterwards I was tortured by the thought of what a piteous part I had played in the conversation. I remember she asked me almost immediately if I had an evening paper. I told her I had left one in my overcoat pocket, and went out in the hall to find it for her.

When I brought it she turned it over impatiently, and leaned towards the light to find something in it, whatever it might be, with avidity. "Ah!" by and by she murmured, "I wanted to see if Mrs. Drummond had obtained her . . . separation. I see that she has done so, and that she has come out of her ordeal . . . with honors."

"There are no honors in all this publicity," I said, stupidly. "I, for one, think it is horrid. A woman must have lost her self-respect to do such a thing."

She turned her head a little in my direction, and, ex-

tricating a blonde tortoise-shell *lorgnon* which she had stuck in her bosom, took a long look at me through its lens.

"You are from . . . er . . . the neighborhood of Boston, are you not?" she asked.

There was certainly no disgrace in being from the neighborhood of Boston ; but somehow, as I bowed my assent, I felt that I was criminating myself. Her tone had managed to make me extremely uncomfortable. Her inquiry seemed to hold a stigma.

"And in Boston, or in your . . . er . . . village, . . . they don't have such dreadful happenings?" she asked, with an amused inflection.

"I don't live in a village," I stammered. My feet seemed suddenly to look queer and large, and I noticed that one of my shoes had moulted a button. I tucked the offender under my chair, and in so doing almost lost my balance and dropped my teacup.

"Will you have some more?" she asked, suavely. "Is your seat uncomfortable? You seem so restless."

I declined the tea, tremblingly put down my china cup, and assured her that my seat was all that I could desire.

"The marriage relation," she went on, "is so intricate and profound that we have not yet solved it here ; but I dare say with you it's all made clear, and that personally you understand it perfectly."

I fumbled for an answer. She was evidently laughing at me ; yet her tone was so grave it seemed hardly credible. I began to feel, however, that slovenly talk and breathless opinions had better be avoided.

"And are you hard at work?" she asked by and by. "Bruce was speaking of you to me. I wish you could persuade him to be more attentive to his studies. He's a dear fellow. I often wonder if it was wise for him to

enter the mining-school. I doubt if engineering is really his taste and vocation. But idleness is deplorable for young men, and I sometimes regret for him that he will have money, and therefore no incentive to work."

"Fame is sweet," I now ventured, determined not to appear the fool she must be thinking me. "Surely money need not prevent us from its pursuit."

"Poverty is a force," she said, laconically.

Her dress to me looked like a sort of veiled softness, falling away transparent and shimmering from her elbows and white wrists. There was a full-blown, yellow-hearted rose near her throat, above the vague outline of her queenly breast. The bust was firm, not large, and her gown fell from beneath those half-globes of ivory, caught in a quaint Eastern turquoise clasp.

"So," she said, after a short pause, "you think Lina Drummond has made a fool of herself?" She had left the tea-table and had come over to a sofa near me.

"I don't take much interest in such things," I murmured, "and I dare say I don't understand them; but I believe, when a woman's married a man, she had better stick to him through thick and thin."

"And this would be your advice in all cases?"

I stared at her blankly. "My advice?"

"Why, yes: are you not a lawyer?"

I began again to wonder why this strange young woman was making persistent fun of me. "A budding one," I answered, blushing and laughing.

"And so this budding lawyer does not approve of . . . Lina?"

"I have not followed the case," I said, with labored dignity, "but what I have read proved to me pretty

clearly that Mrs. Drummond had not been guiltless, to say the least, of . . . imprudence."

"Mrs. Drummond is a friend of mine."

"I am sure I beg your pardon," I answered, a little irritated. How could I tell that she was even an acquaintance?

"And so you disapprove of . . . imprudence; you consider it quite heinous. You are a severe moralist, Mr. Innes. I trust your own conscience is clear, since it is so harsh a judge. Well, perhaps you are right. I am certain there are women who must have anchorage—even if it be in mire; but Lina is not of these."

"Don't you think you are a little unkind to me?" I asked, smiling.

"Perhaps when you know me better you may think differently."

"Shall I ever know you better?" I was surprised at my own temerity.

"Why?"

"Oh, because," I continued, boldly, although my tongue and utterance were thick with agitation and embarrassment, "I have not now the slightest idea whom I am addressing; but I feel sure that if I knew your name and your address it would give me no clue to you yourself,—that no one could ever know you well."

"Is it at college that you learned to say such delightful things?" she asked, taking another long glance in my direction, as if she found amusement in observing me. People of discernment are fond of such studies. I was a willing sacrifice.

"No," I answered, "I have learned within the last fifteen minutes."

"You must be very intelligent, then; it would be almost worth while to undertake your education. But, as you say you don't know me, and you think that no one ever could, would not you who are so wise shrink from drinking at a spring whose source you have not found and fathomed? Would it be quite . . . prudent?"

"Not prudent or wise," I said, rashly, still astonished at myself, "but . . . but . . . sweet!"

"Really? imprudent and dulcet! A pleasant combination. I wish you would stay here, and let me teach you more things: it would occupy me, for, *entre nous*, it is but a dull place."

"I suppose," I said, dropping my voice into a lower and more familiar key, "that if you are all alone here with General and Mrs. Pryor, it may be stupid for you, being so much younger, and Bruce here so little."

"Yes, the Pryors are not amusing, and I am devoured with ennui. But you don't know anything about that; you are too young. Ennui usually follows great desires or emotions; it is very uncomfortable,—a species of disgust, hardly a pain. Neither pleasure nor occupation suffices to it. It craves rapture, and this is just what it shall not find. Even its melancholy is colorless. Of ennui is born the taste for the singular and the unique, which attracts and arrests, sometimes, as much as greatness. Now, I, for instance, am only *ennuyée*, and people call me eccentric. It comes to us when all our dreams of joy are over and there is no further hope of remedy. But, as I say, you are so young, you have not yet reached that dreary level of monotony."

Had I, in fact, been thirty I would have understood the diabolic coquetry of this tirade; but, being twenty, I felt my heart rise and almost choke me in revolt and

pity for this lovely person who was evidently the toy of some cruel destiny. I know not what declaration of this sort I should have been idiotic enough to make, had Bruce not returned at the moment when some imbecility on my part was imminent. I felt it coming on as one does a fit of the ague.

"Halloo! my darling," he said, taking the tall lady in his arms, "have you and Innes been making friends?" He kissed her under her chin and rubbed his hands on her hair, pulling her this way and that. And then I knew that this divine being was no other than my friend's mother. She laughed very heartily at my discomfiture, and so did Bruce, and I joined in their laughter, albeit less effusively.

"You were so perfectly unconscious," she said, a little later, laughing again from her full, round throat. "It was so absurd."

The *tête-à-tête* thus rudely broken was not to be resumed that night. A few moments later General Pryor and his little boy, a pretty child of eight, joined us. He was one of those "show" children, such as I could never have been at any age, picturesquely clad in velvet and lace bravery, with a pair of soft eyes, and bright hair adown his shoulders.

The lady of the house returned to her low seat at the tea-table, and proffered to her husband and eldest son a steaming cup, while she gave Ruthven—this was the child's name—a bit of cake and a taste of milk.

Ruthven and I became fast friends in those few days that I spent near him. He used to play with my watch while I made paper boats for him, and little men and women out of my pocket-handkerchief.

On this evening, sitting about the tea-table, I had ample time to contemplate the family group. It was

certainly a striking one. General Pryor was a man of about fifty. He had a dark, red-brown moustache; his hair was gray. He was tall and stout, with a pleasant blue eye and regular features. Towards me his manner was genial, courteous, even cordial. He was an uncommonly handsome man, but the expression of his face, I noticed almost immediately, was one of profound melancholy. He stood now against the mantel-piece, toying with his spoon, sipping his tea, looking down on the heads of his wife and little son smilingly, but his smile did not reach his eyes. The boy had seated himself on the floor, at his mother's feet, and was playing with the head of a huge wolf-skin which lay under her feet; while Bruce, from his usual favorite vantage-ground, the table, did not for a moment lose that air of distinction which so markedly characterized him. Wherein distinction lies has always baffled me; it baffles the world. That Bruce possessed it no one will gainsay.

Looking at this happy family picture, I felt isolated, a little left out in the cold; and then I was still smarting from the blunders I had so innocently committed. I felt cross with Bruce and with myself.

This, then, was a mother too! Great Cæsar's ghost! She belonged to a type that was not familiar to me, nor common from whence I came. She was a mother, and had even been twice a wife. It seemed impossible, incomprehensible, almost unpleasant. What! the *morbidezza* of that smooth skin, the unwrinkled marble of that haughty brow, at once so tender and courageous, the cool limpidity of those wide pupils, had passed through all this experience?

I would not believe it.

Then—as ever afterwards—this lady remained for me

the enigma which even an Œdipus must needs have died to unravel.

Had I not with a curious prescience told her in that first half-hour that she was unknowable?

II.

BEFORE the dinner two or three guests, country neighbors, lingering, like the Pryors, late from their city homes, arrived. I believe that one of these guests, a young married woman, was extremely pretty, and that the men were as agreeable as the average diner-out. To me they were absolutely insignificant. Mrs. Pryor received them in a simple white toilet. If she had looked young in the fire-light, she looked still younger now, albeit her type of beauty was not the girlish one. General Pryor did the honors with hospitable good breeding. Now and then I noticed that he looked athwart the flowers, which separated them, at his wife, and that his eyes rested upon hers with a peculiar solicitude,—I can find no other word to describe an expression whose meaning eluded me,—and each time he did so I remarked the sadness in his otherwise calm, impassive face. She spoke to him lightly, gayly, as I had heard often other wives speak to other husbands; and with Bruce she was affectionate and playful. She appeared in excellent spirits, and was the life of the banquet, an exquisite little feast whose every detail breathed of her own delicacy.

I was very silent, partly through an unconquerable shyness which possessed and well-nigh overpowered me, silencing my tongue and paralyzing my nerves ever since the afternoon; partly because I could not shake off the memory of Mrs. Pryor's last words of our *tête-*

à-tête. But the ennui and disillusion of which she had then complained seemed to be alike lost sight of to-night.

A respite, after coffee and a *chasse* were served, was passed by the men in smoking, and by the ladies in conversation. When we rejoined them, Mrs. Pryor and her two neighbors, young married women, were about the piano, in the more distant boudoir. They were looking over some music and pressing Mrs. Pryor to sing to them. She refused decidedly at first, but suddenly relented. She seated herself at the piano, and, accompanying herself, began a barcarolle in that pretty Venetian dialect which seems created for the mouth of children :

Coi pensieri malinconici
No te star a tormentar ;
Vien con mi, montemo in gondola,
Andremo in mezo al mar.

Ti xe bella, ti xe zovane,
Ti xe fresca come un fior ;
Vien per tutte le su' lagreme,
Ridi adesso e fa l' amor.

When she had finished she sighed. "Oh, Italia," she murmured, "I was happy then !"

Her contralto voice was, like everything else about her, peculiar. It floated through the room like the plaintive farewell of a heart lost in space. This is the way it impressed me. I only record the feeling ; I make no comment upon it. I was young and ingenuous, and to my ears was given a keenness which has since been dispelled. It is possible, however, that my friend's mother may have sung like a hundred other women, or even less well. She decisively refused to

give us more, replying to the urgency of her guests that she was "not in the mood." She seemed, however, in the mood for talk. To me she appeared very brilliant; yet, although she said striking things, I have often asked myself since if Mrs. Pryor was really clever. I do not know.

A statuette of Canova's led the conversation to him, to his art. Mrs. Pryor told us about a sojourn she had once made in the valley of Pausanio, a fit abode of genius, she said. She had often wandered where the poor boy must have wandered, and pictured him looking over that Italy which was so regally to crown him. What were the boy's hopes and fears? Did he already see before him in his dreams the nude beauty of a Pauline Borghese? She told us of the temple of Canova, that exact reproduction of the Roman Pantheon, but which the frosts, alas! had already injured. She thought the group at Christ's tomb his coldest thought, the least inspired. "I am afraid," she said, turning to the Cupid and Psyche, "he was a pagan, after all."

She spoke of modern art and its fantastic quality, its want of color, and its note of unhealthiness. Ah, well, she for herself thought that there was nothing like a life free from all ambitions, all desires. "I don't wish it for my sons," she added, "but for me . . . it suffices." Her little *entourage* listened to her words like people accustomed to do her homage, enthralled, a little astonished.

When she spoke of herself I instinctively turned to look at her husband, but found that he had left the room. I saw his tall form, now and then, passing and repassing a window, as he paced the long piazza smoking in the cold moonlit night.

After the guests had gone and the good-nights had

been exchanged, Bruce and I indulged in a cigarette up in my room, where a wood fire dispensed its genial welcome. Bruce, in those days, was in love; and for the hundredth time a certain letter which his beloved had written to him was parleyed over, weighed, discussed, dissected, and I was bidden discover hidden meanings of which, I confess, the writer was probably as innocent as I was. The girl was a certain Tessie Vaux, considered a belle and wit in the university town where we had won our laurels. She was, in fact, what college belles are apt to be, an ordinary young person, with a good deal of *aplomb* and an excellent opinion of herself. Her pristine innocence had somewhat suffered in a series of rather coarse love escapades with two or three roughly adoring students. She was fairly pretty, "made eyes" indiscriminately, laughed a great deal, and was *facile*, but Bruce insisted that he loved her. I think he was trying to assure himself that he did so. We go on saying a thing of ourselves long after it has ceased to be true, from the force of habit; and Bruce had been insisting upon this with unnecessary vehemence for more than a year.

I remember this evening, when I was called upon to sympathize with the violence of his passion and to be revolted at the depths of the young lady's perfidy—which I was expected to combat—I became conscious of an extreme mental lassitude. I even felt inclined to agree with him that he had been extremely ill-used; which was not at all what he had come to my room for. The love-confidences of the immature form one of the most dispiriting, fatiguing, and absurd of all life's experiences. I had, however, not yet reached the age when one would walk ten miles to escape them. The thing itself is so foolish! And one has to look so

grave! As a woman once said to me of her growing sons, "And oh! those terrible love-affairs!"

Suddenly now Bruce's *passionnette* seemed to have dwindled into tedious and trivial insignificance. I found that I was forcing myself to listen to the oft-reiterated story with ill-disguised restlessness and wavering attention, until my good-natured companion, evidently not finding the usual responsiveness, rose, and said, "Well, old fellow, I guess I'll turn in now."

He glanced, as he moved towards the door, at a portrait of his step-father which hung over the mantelpiece. "He's devoted to my mother," he said. "He's splendid!" And with those words, picking up his letters and photographs, he got himself off.

It was very late. I prepared to seek my bed; but I had fallen into the bad habit of nocturnal reading, and looked about for a book,—a novel which I had heard much discussed, and which I thought I had left upon my table. I did not find it, however, and suddenly remembered that it was down-stairs, in Mrs. Pryor's boudoir, where I had held it for a moment in my hands. I therefore decided, as sleep seemed not imminent, to descend in search of it. I stepped softly, not to disturb the slumbering household, carrying my candle aloft in my hand. When I reached the hall a gust of wind from an open window blew it out. The servants had extinguished the lamps. I found myself, except for one moonbeam which fell across my feet, in almost entire obscurity. I crept, however, to the boudoir door, which was ajar. I pushed it open and closed it gently behind me, thrusting, as I did so, my fingers in my pocket in search of my match-box. But as I looked up I become aware not only that I was not in total darkness, but that I was not alone. The apart-

ment in which I stood was itself deserted, but through the curtain which half concealed the door-way the light of a lamp streamed, and voices came distinctly to my ears. I made a step forward to announce myself. It was not in my character or traditions to sneak or hide, even less to be an eavesdropper. Why was it, then, that I found myself powerless to move, stir, or speak? That curious shyness which had invaded me at the table overcame me once again, and I found that I could only count narrow, immediate, and personal expediency. The ultimate of a false position had to be accepted, drowned, in the *mauvaise honte* which dissuaded me from boldly stepping forth into the light. I should be importunate, ridiculous, grotesque, and a pair of ironical, derisive if beautiful eyes would not be slow in making me aware of the fact. Something whispered to me, "Beware of the high, and hold on to the safe!" I "held on," and remained concealed.

The other room was bathed in light and revealed clearly its occupants; they were General and Mrs. Pryor. I can still see them in detail, minutely, like two photogravures imprinted on my retina and brain. Curiosity sapped what was left to me of honor; I stood, I heard, a prey to a mutinous impatience, yet soon breathless with a first revelation of life's unseen, unguessed abysses.

In the first triumph of wrong-doing right suffers discouragement. Let those who blame me for having remained lift up their hands, question their own hearts, and be sure that their hiding-places flash not upon them to reveal terrible hypocrisies.

The lamp shone keenly upon my host and hostess. She was leaning against the mantel-piece, her back to the flame, while he, confronting her, was a few paces

nearer to me. Her elegant silhouette was brought into strong relief against the background of the fire. The mantel-shelf behind her was heaped with roses.

Her husband's stern profile was projected against the draperies of a rich, dark curtain.

III.

FIVE seconds had not elapsed when I became perfectly aware that I was assisting at no commonplace interview between these two people.

It was Mrs. Pryor who was speaking: "A first mistake may be a youthful folly, born of inexperience; a second one is a crime." She spoke in trembling accents, and did not raise her eyelids.

"But why a mistake?" said General Pryor. He spoke quietly, but there was a note of agitation in his tone. "What do you desire? What do you ask of me that I can give,—that I have not given? You bade me leave the army; it was the career of my choice, the only thing I was good for,—made for. I gave it up to your caprice."

"You do well," she said, bowing her head on her breast, "to remind me of your sacrifices."

"I do what I can; I am but human."

"You were a god to me, I know, . . . at first," she faltered.

"No, I was no god; I am a man." He moved a step nearer to her.

She raised her head quickly, darting a look as of fear into his face. "What will you have me to do?" she asked, clasping her hands together and wringing them.

"Ah!" he cried, "love me a little."

Her head fell forward again upon her breast, and she remained speechless.

"You were not always so passionless," he continued. "Do you remember the evening . . . "

"Yes," she said, "I remember." And I thought that she shivered: it may have been my fancy.

"Have you anything to accuse me of?" She did not answer.

He moved to her and took one of her hands. It seemed to lie lifeless and limp in his own. He leaned over it, looking at it curiously. Then he drew from the fourth finger a diamond ring which he slipped on one of his own. There was another circlet left upon her hand, however, a plain gold one. He pushed it up and down two or three times along her long white finger; and as he did so he gazed at her keenly. "Why do you still wear it?" he asked.

"I am Ruthven's mother."

"And my wife,—mine; do you hear? This hand is mine,—mine!" He crushed and wrung it. "And you are my child's mother; so, do what you will, a link binds you to me, a bondage if you will, but your fate. Resist it as you may, you cannot escape it." He looked at her almost fiercely; his lips trembled, his breath came quickly through his dark moustache.

"You would not take the child from me?" she said, in a frightened whisper.

He dropped her hand as if it were a snake that had stung his. "My God!" There was a long pause; then, turning from her, "Good-night," he said, and left her alone. I heard him go heavily up-stairs two flights, and then, in the silence, turn a lock, enter a room, and close a door. Its bang shook the windows of the old house, resounding and echoing through the

sleeping corridors; so . . . only Mrs. Pryor and I were left. I was now so fearful that she would know of my presence that my very heart-beats were a pain to me, and I held my breath almost to suffocation. She flung up her arms over her head, and gave an exclamation which seemed full of ineffable weariness. She then turned and laid her cheek upon the mantel-shelf, among the white roses which were not more pale. I do not know how long we both remained immovable, I still watching her from my dark hiding-place. After a little while she gave another smothered sigh, and murmured, "This infinite, raging heart-hunger, and nothing,—nothing!" Then, passing her fingers over her brow, she advanced to the burning lamp, turned it out suddenly, and vanished in the darkness. Again I heard the ascent, this time of a light, womanly step, the swish of draperies, a moment's pause upon the landing, a door pushed open and closed.

I felt that what I had done was sacrilegious, but it was too late. I waited only a few moments, then furtively sought once more my apartment.

The next morning Bruce and I had our coffee served to us in his study, a pleasant little room which adjoined his bed-chamber. At ten o'clock we were already on the tennis-ground. General Pryor, I was told, had taken an early train to West Point, to meet some old army friends of his who were there for a day or two. Mrs. Pryor had not appeared. At about eleven, however, she came across the lawn to join us. She called out to me, "Oh, Mr. Innes! Will you drive with me in fifteen minutes? I have ordered the village cart, and will take you over to the Sawmill valley."

My heart gave a thump; I threw down my bat and hurried to her side. "I can be ready directly,"

I said, mopping my forehead, "and I will be delighted."

"Very well; in a quarter of an hour please meet me on the porch." And she passed quickly on to speak to her son.

It was only when seated in the carriage beside her that I could take another look at her. Why is it that wifehood and motherhood, these mysteries of life, seem to leave no trace upon some women? Nay, their pain and trouble, transports and joys, alike pass over them, leaving a certain virginity of soul which can be felt, not described. Mrs. Pryor was one of these. I could not now possibly picture her in any of those intimate moments when Proteus would have cried to her,—

> And I remember that on such a day
> I found thee with eyes bleared and cheeks all pale,
> And lips that trembled to a voiceless cry,
> And that thy bosom in my bosom lay.

For of last night not a trace,—none. I asked myself if it were not all a chimera, a dream born of fevered unreality. Yet, albeit she had about her this curious aroma of the unapproachable and not proven, by a strange paradox never was the sense of sex so strong as when in Mrs. Pryor's vicinity. There detached itself from her broidered vest a subtle fluid which pierced my being with a pang. I sat close to her skirts, in a state of admiration and subserviency, at once mute and amazed. Our way lay for a short distance on the main road or highway, but in a few minutes we had turned into a quiet cross-lane. In summer it must have been luxuriant of shadow. Even now it was sheltered by the trees whose trunks were half hidden under the shining, verdant, vagrant laurels. The freshness, the perfume, the melodies of nature linger in the Indian summer

days, filling the veins with keen, sensuous delights, tinged as these last hours of autumn are with mortal languor. The haze lay like a veil upon the dark valley, and the nearer low hills covered with brown furze and brushwood. Their russet hues made a trenchant contrast to an indistinct gray sky. I looked at my companion, and for the first half-mile I could find no word to say to her. She had her hands full with the spirited sorrel mare she was driving, and did not seem herself inclined to much conversation.

The relief of thought is action. I found mine in speech: it was terribly young. "How beautiful you are!" I said to her.

She laughed: she was evidently not displeased. "An old woman like me," she said, touching the mare's neck with her whip. "Why, I am thirty-eight!" Last evening her eyes had seemed to me profound wells in which death might lurk. They glanced at me now coquettishly and almost merrily.

"One may ask a woman's age," I said, flushing, "but a goddess is immortal."

"Very prettily said," she replied, still smiling, "but I assure you that I am no goddess; only a good, ordinary person, devoted to my household and its interests, my husband, my son, my baby, jogging on to middle life, content and happy. How can you make a heroine of *me?*"

"Because," I replied, "you are not only a goddess, but you are the first *woman* I have ever met."

"And you like the sensation, eh?"

"I don't know."

"What is it like, pray?"

"It is like . . . like . . . dying!"

"Oh, dear me!" Then, after a pause, "And didn't

the girls at your college make you feel like . . . like . . . dying?"

"I didn't even know any of them."

"Oh, then you can't tell."

"Yes, I can; they were rag dolls."

"And I am not a rag doll. Much obliged for the compliment."

"Mrs. Pryor?"

"Mr. Innes."

"Which do you think we are punished for the most in this world, our follies or our crimes?"

She gave a little jerk to the reins and looked at me narrowly, but I managed a stout front.

"Why?"

"Because I want you to take an interest in me, to give me advice."

"What about?"

"Anything you like; I need it about everything."

"I will answer your question: I think what we are punished the most severely for is doing our duty. Ah! the limits of correctness of conduct are so soon reached, so easily set for us by others! I never did my duty but once, and I have been persecuted ever since."

"Where I come from the 'moral sense' is pre-eminent, duty is a big thing. Then you advise a fellow to let duty slip?"

"Oh, I don't know; I was thinking of women. If I had a daughter, she should not know the meaning of the word. With sons it is different. Boys must be whipped into shape. Mine adore me; that is the essential."

I confess I was somewhat aghast. These were not the tenets of my bringing up. "Most children," she went on, "hate or fear their parents and constantly deceive them. Mine love me, and have no secrets from

me. Bruce has even told me all about the Vaux girl; she is quite dreadful, is not she?"

I admitted that to me she was "dreadful."

"Bruce is all over it," she said. "He only thinks it well to keep up the whimper."

"I don't want to talk about Bruce."

"Whom do you want to talk about?"

"You."

"Pshaw! I gave you the epitome of my career. Tell me something about yourself."

"I am the youngest and ugliest of my mother's eight children. That is all there is to tell."

"You are ugly, but decidedly I like your appearance. You are broad-shouldered, and you look honest."

I felt inclined to tell her that I was all hers,—my legs would run to do her errands, my arms were at her service to do her bidding,—but I had a second attack of timidity, which I had lost only for a moment.

"No," she continued, after a moment's pause, "there is only one thing you must guard against: don't miss your life."

"Why, . . . naturally!"

"I mean in its emotional side, its affections. That is the great miss; all the rest is nothing. The world doesn't belong to cold hearts, don't you believe it. That is a fallacy. Dare to feel,—to express it: that is everything."

"It is my nature to be reticent."

"Ah! I am sorry to hear it: it is that which has ruined many lives. I am reticent too: it has ruined mine."

"We'll stop and see my mother," she said by and by, when we had turned to come home. We neared the broad mansion, hidden amid its trees, before whose

marble portals the grass-sward still remained mossy and green in spite of the late season. We were ushered through two or three elegant drawing-rooms into the presence of Mrs. Durant, Bruce's grandmother. We found this lady alone by the fire, with an elderly gentleman whom she and her daughter called "Admiral." He looked like a well-preserved Frenchman, vivacious, polite, polished, and sawed the air with one hand when he spoke, as if keeping at bay some invisible enemy, possibly old age.

Mrs. Durant seemed almost as youthful as her daughter in figure and movements. There was a strange bloom upon her cheeks, which my *naïveté* at first accepted as the remains of a departed youth, and which seemed to lend lustre to her dark eye. When she accompanied us to the door, however, its cruel revelations suggested that the color of her complexion, and also that of her hair, was somewhat apocryphal. She was extremely animated, almost febrile in her vivacity, in contrast to Mrs. Pryor's extreme repose ; but she was not devoid of a certain grace and dignity, as of a woman accustomed to the world.

After having just touched her lips to her daughter's cheek, "Shall you not go to the reception for the French frigate?" she asked. "The admiral is persuading me to arrange a party."

"No," said Mrs. Pryor, "I shall not go."

"Why not, my daughter? It is absurd the way you mope.—Try," she said, "Mr. Innes," turning to me, "to persuade Bruce to insist that his mamma goes down with me. I shall ask the Laurences, the Gardiners, and some men. I am sure," said Mrs. Durant, laughing, "I often wonder how you are a daughter of mine at all. At your age I was always in everything. I never

was content unless on the crest of the wave. You are an oddity. You must shake yourself up, Claire; you have got no ambition."

"No," said Mrs. Pryor. "I have none."

"Mrs. Pryor has 'arrived,'" said the admiral, gallantly. "She has attained everything."

"Thanks," said Mrs. Pryor, smiling, albeit a little coldly.

"Yes," continued the admiral, "Mrs. Pryor may say, with Sardou's heroine, 'Oh, monsieur, I was already discovered!' that is done."

The visit was a short one, and then we drove homewards. It was only a sixth of a mile, and there were but two or three words said. "You look," she said, "as if you had been well brought up. I am sure you have a good mother."

"Yes," I said, "she is, in fact, very good."

"And I," she murmured under her breath, "have had no mother." And just then I looked at her, and our eyes met, and I felt that I wished I might die for her; but, as my eyes are small, fishy, and opaque, I doubt if she read in them these interesting announcements, or fathomed the intensity of my emotions. She would probably have thought them absurd; I myself realize that they were insensate.

Well, I remained only two days longer, but when I had bidden farewell to my friend's mother I was desperately in love with her, and I think she knew it. I think she was a person who had the energy of exact conclusions.

IV.

THERE can be nothing particularly edifying in a detailed, minute record of the extraordinary passion which

for many long months consumed me. I have always remembered it with astonishment, but never with shame. Nothing could have been less shameful. If its sentiments shook my senses and fired my imagination, the aliments which these received were so meagre, the diet was so strict and lean, that the veriest ascetic could not have begrudged me its strange hallucinations. It did little harm to anybody else. I must confess, however, that while it lasted it ravaged me. The Pryors moved into their city home in good season. My career was a serious and arduous one, while Bruce was a butterfly of pleasure. He dropped soon into a gay, rollicking set of fellows, who spent more money than I could have commanded, and whose tastes and habits were not my own. I had no taste for dissipation, was always something of a plodder. Bruce's friends seemed to me foolish and wild; they thought me dull and slow. We were supremely uncongenial.

Mrs. Pryor I met occasionally, twice at the opera, once at a ball. Once I dined at her house. When I called afterwards she was not alone. I went again. I became a frequent visitor at her house, but I usually found her surrounded by friends. Of course it was impossible that a lady of her engagements and occupations should pay the slightest attention to me. She in fact paid very little. I think I was a great amusement to her friends. I sometimes noticed that the men who surrounded her exchanged enigmatic glances when I entered. I used to ring her door-bell at five o'clock, and be ushered into the dainty drawing-room, which seemed pervaded with her strange personality. Sometimes I brought her flowers. She used to nod her thanks and lay them upon the table. I think she forgot them directly. When half the winter was over I

began to suspect that she was very tired of me. I am quite sure now that it must have been so. I suspected it with shame and pain. I used to resolve that I would not go again for a very long time. I would count the days; then at last, weakly, I would go once more. She was never alone, never once. It was the same at the opera; she would extend three gloved fingers over the shoulders and heads of others who flocked into her box, smile at me, and that was all. Yet I lingered in her box, standing about blocking the door-way, awkward, intrusive, stupid, miserable. It did not matter; every time I entered her presence she exerted upon me the same bewildering sorcery. Every time her garments brushed me I felt myself more and more her slave.

She seemed to hold a little court of her own, but she was not one of those women who are called social leaders; I think it would have wearied her. I think everything wearied her. Mrs. Pryor was a little tired. Towards the end of the season her smile became more and more perfunctory, still soft, but colder. She probably thought that I had no tact. After those first two or three days, now so distant, spent at her country-house, she had ceased to be coquettish with me; her attention wandered when I spoke to her. She seemed always *distraite*, preoccupied.

What was the enigma of her life? I do not know; I never knew. When I think of her now I hardly feel sure whether she was as beautiful as I imagined her. I once heard some women speak of her beauty slightingly; I once overheard some men say that she was foolish. They may have been right; but in those days I had but one thought,—"Oh to see her alone once more!" What should I have said to her? Probably nothing. Yet I knew I had much to tell her,—oh, so much!

everything,—everything which the months, the years had stifled and held back on my heart.

One evening I escorted her to her carriage, at the theatre. The night was stormy; a gust from the banging lobby door shivered over her. Mrs. Pryor shuddered and complained of being chilly. Two days later I received a hurried note from Bruce. "Dear old fellow," he wrote, "we are in great trouble. Come round and see me." I hurried into my coat and hat, and was soon at the Pryors' door. The summons had sent a painful presage through my boy's heart. I rang and asked for Mr. Bruce. The servant said, "Directly, sir." He looked grave. He went up-stairs hurriedly, and left me standing in the hall. A brougham and an open gig stood outside in the street; their horses were being walked up and down in the snowy night. An awning was stretched across the sidewalk from the house next door. There was a dance in progress there. I could hear the music. It shook the thin partition walls.

While I stood in the hall-way I heard a voice from some subterranean channel say, "Don't make no noise, that's a little dear!" and the next moment a child's head appeared at the pantry door. He came out. It was Ruthven. He held a piece of bread in one hand and a glass of milk in the other. He stopped under the landing, put his provisions down on the floor, and, clambering up into a high, antique, carved chair, began to pull off his boots. When he had done so he sprang out of the chair, took up his supper, and began to creep slowly up in his stocking-feet. The hall was large, wide, dim; he did not see me. His round, short face with its tangled frame of light hair rose from out his flannel dressing-gown like a flower. The garment hung loosely from his narrow shoulders, enveloping his

little, thin, flexile child's body. There was something inexplicably pathetic in the unconscious little figure picking its way carefully on the thick velvet of the Axminster carpet; and the child's action had shot through me with a swift terror. "Ruthven!" I cried, in a loud whisper.

He turned, saw, recognized me, and slowly and with a grave dignity came down the stairs again cautiously. He extended his thin hand. "How do you do, Mr. Innes?" he said, with his quaint, old-fashioned courtesy.

"What has happened?" I asked.

"Dear mamma is ill," said the child. "Mary was busy, so I went down myself to fetch my supper."

"Is your mamma very ill?" I said to him.

"I don't know," he answered, vaguely. "I cannot tell."

"Are the doctors with her?"

"They have a . . . consolation," he said, gravely. "They are in the parlor. Papa is with them."

I could not help smiling. "A consultation, you mean," I said. "Ah! then they will find out something that will do your mamma good."

"Is that the watch that has the face on it?" he asked, eagerly, as I seated myself and drew him between my knees,—"the one your grandpapa gave you?" This old time-piece had been a constant source of delight and wonder to him during my visit of the autumn days.

"No," I said; "it's another one."

"Has it a face too?"

"No."

"Let me see for myself." And he pulled it out and began to turn it over. Just then the servant returned

and begged me to come up; Mr. Bruce wanted to see me in his room. So I left Ruthven and followed the man. Bruce met me at the door; he pulled me in; he was weeping. "Dear old fellow!" he said, "you are good to come. I wanted you. Those other fellows don't understand. You see, I'm all broken up. I had no one else in the world but her and the kid. I hate my grandmother worse than poison, and now . . . now . . ."

"Now?"

Then he came forward, threw one arm about my neck, his head rolled on my shoulder, and he burst into loud sobbings. "Oh, my darling mother! my darling mother!" he said.

"Try and be a man and control yourself. Hush, hush! she may hear you. She is strong, she is young."

He shook his head. "They come three times a day," he sobbed,—"three times!"

"What is it?"

"Pneumonia. She caught cold at the theatre; she had a chill, and then . . . oh, my dear little mother! Oh, my! oh, my! she was so sweet. What shall I do? I tell you what, Innes, it's rough."

"Yes," I said.

Mrs. Pryor died that night.

Three days afterwards I sat in a dark corner of the great city church, and I saw her coffin borne up behind the white-robed choristers, and as they walked they sang. It was covered with a dark purple pall, and on it were a great many flowers. Behind, alone, walked General Pryor, erect, with set lips, his face livid, but he was calm. Behind him came Bruce, with round shoulders, weeping, leading his little brother Ruthven

by the hand. The baby face looked up bewildered, frightened, from its black jacket.

Then came others, women in long veils, and men with sombre mien. And lastly some young girls fluttered up in rather jaunty black hats, looking about. I suppose they were relatives.

But I was not of them. Of course I had been nothing to her, nothing; her son's schoolmate,—nothing. Had she known? Did she know now? I felt that if she had been happy I might have better spared her. But "she was not happy, she was not happy," I kept repeating to myself. And her life and its sorrows would forever remain unknown to me. Oh, God, she had suffered, suffered! Was she happy now? Then I prayed fervently, ardently, with bowed head, "God make her happy now; by the still waters, in thy green pastures, give her peace!" In those days I still had kept my boyhood's faith.

It was the next May that I sought her grave. It was an odd thing to do. I remember I first went to a florist's and bought a bouquet of white lilies. They tied them up for me with a bit of white paper about them, and I carried them thus in my hand. Then I took a train and travelled for an hour. At the station I met some fellows who chaffed me about my parcel. "Isn't he fresh?" they said. "They're for his girl."

When I reached my destination I was told the cemetery was up the hill. It was a lovely spring day. The landscape was mellow and sweet, not sublime. To mediocre minds like my own a country hedge-row is enough. Genius craves the open,—wide, wind-swept plains, an illimitable ocean. I am content sitting in a hay-field, under a rick.

The full summer splendor was not yet awake. The

verdure had a languishing tint, but there were some blossoming shoots on the saplings. A gray silvery haze lowered from the heavens' blue solitude. The great woods from the crest of the rising ground looked like black smoke on a reddish sky. On the wide avenues and narrow lanes a few dead leaves of the last autumn were still piled close to the fences. There they had lain all winter, under the harsh frosts, imprisoned. The oblique, glad sun-rays seemed to bring their brown surfaces into a new radiance of color. They were like a dead love illumined again to a spasmodic life by the tone of remembered voices, by the melody of some old refrain wafted from the past. The bell of the little church at the cemetery gate was swinging out the hour. Its tones vibrated like pearls of ice through the limpidity of the pure atmosphere. A purple steam rose here and there, from unseen house-tops, straight and slow in the sleepy breezes.

The man at the gate explained to me the way. They were mowing the grass. There were men at work on some of the graves, but the plot which I sought was silent and lonely ; it already looked a little neglected. I knew her grave-stone at once, it was so clean and white. The grass was uneven, dank, and wet. I thought of her pale loveliness, of her hands, of her star-like eyes. I remembered her, erect and elegant, singing to us the Venetian song.

Ti xe bella, ti xe zovane,
Ti xe fresca come un fior;
Vien per tutte le su' lagreme,
Ridi adesso e fa l' amor.

I threw my lilies on the earth.

Are there a good and an evil angel who breathe on

this organ of life, the heart? If it is but a sponge dipped in blood, whence then come its sudden aspirations, its cries, its anguish? Why do certain words, certain sounds, certain shadows on a wall, wring the soul with such strange agony? From the foot of the valley, like a spiral melody, rose her voice in a long sob to my ear. There seemed to be in it an echo of reproach. I said to myself, "It is the south wind." In fact, it was only the wind, but it woke in me a feeling of detachment from all else. What I experienced was at once sweet and terrible. I was alone with her . . . once more . . . at last.

Conquered

I.

WHEN Mrs. Trevor died, there were many ominous waggings of the head. The gossips said she had at last given her husband an excellent chance to disgrace himself. What particular form of divagation it would be that this injudicious gentleman would now visit upon the unoffending heads of his anxious relatives found no formula in expression.

"Disgrace" is a good enough every-day word to fling about. It is appalling and conclusive. There is no doubt about it that Mr. Trevor had been a target for calumny. Why he should be so, was difficult to determine; possibly, because he was so very good-natured.

Such stigma, however, as may have rested upon Mr. Trevor senior's reputation for respectability—there was a young Mr. Trevor, who had a handsome wife—remained vague and obscure. Some aspersions had been cast upon his morals, now and then, as they are inevitably on successful people, who have aroused rivalries and therefore enmities. They had generally been quickly stilled. Like every rich man, he was credited with certain foibles and follies which might or might

not have facts behind them. His wife did not appear to be greatly disturbed by them. She was an intellectual woman, and she was highly educated ; her husband, although a man of ability, was not. From her earliest married years, she had treated him indulgently, as one does a child or an inferior,—with a care, however, not to strain this attitude of leniency too far. She desired to inspire him with a certain wholesome awe. She was authoritative. The love of material blessings was not entirely left out, however, of Mrs. Trevor's composition, and she seemed, notwithstanding her lofty ideals, to fully appreciate all the good things that were provided for her.

There were those that said Mr. Trevor was neglectful of his wife. In her early life, however, this neglect could not have been pronounced. The lady had borne her lord a family of sons and daughters, of which feat she spoke with pride. They were now all married. Mrs. Trevor was one of those persons who command everybody's respect, the admiration of a few, but are not beloved. It had never been supposed that her husband entertained for her a large degree of affection. If she suffered from this, she made no sign. Pity is the scourge of proud natures. Mrs. Trevor was proud. She had made no confidences. She had seen that her sons were prepared for college, being herself fully equipped for this task ; that her girls were taught to dance and sing and paint, were well dressed, knew the right people, and were thus fitted for social honors. If she had choked their impulses with the sterile sands of egotism, had made them a little hard and selfish, they were at least well-mannered and distinguished. She looked upon her husband as an unconquered, untamed remnant of natural man, and had imbued his children

with a certain undisguised contempt for "papa." She had always seen to it, however, that his table was properly set, his friends properly received, that he was properly fed and warmed and skilfully nursed when he was ill. She attended regularly to her church and charities, and was met at such functions as society exacted from her position and her wealth; yet, if this lady's loving kindnesses were hardly "cruel," they were certainly not gentle. There had been a degree of rigidity in her attitude, of aggressiveness in her sacrifices.

When she was dead, it was almost a relief. The community drew a long breath. It is just possible that her lord was a little relieved, too.

His daughter Mattie undertook to console him in his bereavement. Mattie was full of faults, but she had somehow escaped the family failing of selfishness. She was very human, and she was fond of her father.

A young gentleman, whose advances to this youngest and favorite daughter (the Mattie in question) Mr. Trevor had discountenanced, said in the club, one evening, shortly after Mrs. Trevor's funeral,—

"The old goat will marry Jessie Fallon now; he has been after her; now she will be after him."

Jessie Fallon was a young woman who danced a certain eccentric dance and sang a still more eccentric song at a popular concert-hall. She was reputed to be alluring and clever. She never wasted any time on the impecunious ardors of early youth. She was, at any rate, extremely good-looking.

This remark wandered down the club steps and up the avenue, and flew in at open windows near which fair matrons sipped their cups of tea in the soft airs of a languid spring. It grew and increased, and waxed por-

tentous, until there was much clacking of tongues. "It would be so horrid for Mattie!"

Mattie lived at home. She had been a spoiled and wilful girl, had made an unworldly love-match, and had found it convenient to remain in the parent-nest. Her unprosperous husband, who was a poet, thought the Trevor mansion sufficiently comfortable. He was one of those beings whom nature seems to have essentially fitted for the *rôle* of son-in-law. He was making of it a career. When he was not in the travail of composition, he ran errands for his wife or for his wife's mother, answered notes for the head of the household, and played head-nurse to the baby in moments of domestic upheaval, when necessity demanded. In return for this exemplary conduct, he was given a sumptuous bed-chamber and study in the third story, and had excellent things to eat and drink at his command. The poems were supposed to pay for his clothes. Mattie alone knew that they did not. Mr. Trevor pretended not to suspect it. His worst enemy had never called him ungenerous.

A year passed and found Miss Jessie Fallon no nearer reaching the goal of her ambition, which was said to be the securing unto herself of a wealthy and *à la mode* husband. She still sang and pirouetted, chalked her nose and rouged her cheeks, and kicked and shrieked, and stood on her head at the concert-hall over the café, while Mr. Trevor still wore black crape on his hat, and did not yet discard his sombre hose and gloves.

A few months after his wife's death he had joined a quiet card club, consisting of about five married couples of his acquaintance, persons he liked well enough, but whom, under happier circumstances, he rarely met. Mattie had persuaded him that he could not go with

propriety to men's dinners under twelve months, much less to "mixed" ones, as she called feasts which women grace, and that he must not be seen at the opera—of which he was fond—until his term of mourning should have expired; so . . . he had consented to play cards once a week with these quiet friends, as a distraction to his grief, when he had any time to waste away from his club.

There was a retired army officer and "his lady," as the hotel clerks have it; a middle-aged banker of Knickerbocker ancestry, with a whimsical wife, at whose house the reunions took place; a broker of sixty-five and his unmarried daughter of forty; two or three other men of leisure or affairs, as the case might be,—persons who did not go into the world, yet whose eyes and ears were open with sufficient alertness to its performance. To these people Mr. Trevor was a coveted and desirable acquisition. He was their only man of fashion. He had the prestige of a certain usage of the world, with an easy joviality which pleased. The rumor that he was a black sheep, which had reached the members of the card club, but enhanced the self-approbativeness of their own white consciences. They congratulated themselves on having a catholic spirit, on being men and women of the world, who, so long as a man conducted himself with propriety while in their midst, would not put him to any crucial test of private behavior.

Ah! . . . there is just one person I have forgotten to mention, who glided in silently and unobtrusively every Saturday night, and took her seat at one of the card tables. The whimsical wife of the banker soon managed that it should always be at the same one with Mr. Trevor, an arrangement which the maiden of forty

looked upon with some disfavor. The hostess was a woman of charm, through a certain graceful and mischief-loving humor. If her physical attractions, which had been of no mean order, were now somewhat dimmed, her humor had not deserted her. Was it not a drop of this quality which lurked in her manœuvre? The guest whom she managed to thus assure as *vis-à-vis* to Mr. Trevor was a lady, by name Mrs. Gardiner Fenton. Everybody, of course, knew the Gardiner Fentons. The name was enough, no introduction was necessary. Mrs. Fenton's daughters had been belles of two successive winters, and now that they were both married, were still reigning beauties. When one looked into their mother's face, it was not difficult to fathom whence they had drawn their comeliness. I say that Mrs. Gardiner Fenton needed no introduction; yet, curiously enough, Mr. Trevor, although he had seen her daughters in the world, had not met her before. If her daughters had inherited their beauty from their mother, the reader need not therefore imagine that at this moment of her life Mrs. Gardiner Fenton was, strictly speaking, beautiful. She was not. If Julie de Récamier Diane de Poitiers and Ninon de l'Enclos drank of the fountains of eternal youth, and were fondly loved and desired at ages when other women are content to be grandmothers, certain it is that their peculiar secrets were unknown and unpractised by Mrs. Gardiner Fenton. She was fifty, and she looked it. She even acknowledged it. She exclaimed one day, over the game of euchre that was in progress, that the following Saturday would be her fiftieth birthday, and that she should be greatly offended if her hostess did not provide a cake with fifty candles to welcome her. She was taken at her word, and fifty wax lights greeted

her soft eyes on the occasion. Mr. Trevor had been gallant and had sent a magnificent nosegay of red roses, which she found lying upon her chair. She buried her face in its fragrance, and rewarded the donor with a faint smile. Their eyes met; she blushed. At fifty, Beatrix Fenton could blush like a young girl. In many things she was one still. There are women who have kept at seventy a certain virginity of soul; others have lost it at eighteen. Possibly it was this retained innocence which made her sons so fond of her. Had she been a saint or a Madonna, they could not have given her a more worshipful affection. Of sons, she had two, now men, launched in life, and then there were the daughters of whom I have spoken. She lived in her beautiful home in New Jersey, where she owned ancestral acres, and she only came to town to pass her Sundays with her daughters. The Saturday card party was her one dissipation.

Since her husband's death, which had occurred twenty-three years before, she had never been to a ball, and she had never worn a color. A gay aunt had chaperoned her girls. At the wedding of her daughters she had indeed compromised by appearing in white and mauve, and her elegance had then been commented upon. Striking she certainly was. She was tall and stately, with a full and rounded figure, which, in girlhood, had been called willowy, although it was so no more. She did nothing, however, to enhance its fine outlines. Her gowns only fitted moderately well, as she was too indifferent to try them on often, and was therefore the despair of the dressmakers. She usually wore high-necked black silk or velvet, with the addition, on certain occasions, of white lace and pearls. She rarely showed her arms or her bosom. When she did

so, it was very moderately; they were seen to be of dazzling fairness and still fresh and firm. The throat was devoid of that dark circle which the years usually dig beneath the larynx; but, as I say, persons rarely saw aught but her face and her hands; these were delicate and white. Her hair was worn in an old-fashioned ripple, down close on each side of her temples, and fastened in a knot at the back of her head. It was of a very light silky brown, and still thick. There were few gray hairs among its natural waves, but some there were. She wore them neither with coquetry nor vexation; she had hardly noticed them. Her forehead was high and spiritual; her eyes were large and expressive, rather tender and gentle than brilliant. Her nose was superb, straightly and nobly chiselled. Her mouth was sad, the lips a trifle worn, turned up a little at one corner when she smiled. This, with the tremolo of her low voice, gave an inexpressible pathos to her rare laughter. Her soft cheeks were not as rounded as once they had been; a pale pink rose sometimes burned on them, but, like her smile, was fugitive. Withal that time had treated her so kindly, Mrs. Fenton looked nearly, if not fully, her age. Her manner, her aspect, was that of one who has long since ceased to wish to attract. The wish had never been emphatic. She had at no age been what is called a man's woman. She was not very clever and she was not fascinating. It is to be supposed that her husband had loved her. His had been her first offer and her only one. Since her widowhood, no man had dared to say a word of love or even of admiration to her. They instinctively felt more like uncovering or kneeling before her than making love to her, if they felt anything at all. To most men she was simply the mother of

children; an admirable lady, refined and virtuous. Yet that girlish timidity which lay in her character did not stamp her as eminently the mother.

It is even possible that her children loved her more warmly than she did them. She met their affection, particularly when it was demonstrative, with a certain protesting gratitude. Hers was not an intense temper. She was placid and serene, fulfilling all her duties with regularity, but with a certain nonchalance. Small natures, whose egotism asks too much of life, turn sour. She had indulged in no vivid or exaggerated dreams, and so the dregs of her nature, when stirred, were sweet. She had never asked too much of fortune or of men, hence she did not dislike humanity. She took little interest in public affairs. The motives and convulsions of empires and republics, diplomatic combinations, the clash of arms, the slaughter of men, the shock of ideas, left her without curiosity or emotion. The forum, the camp, the mart, were mere words to her. It is probable that Thucydides's description of the final destruction of the Athenian host would have left her cold. She read little, only a few novels, and, in periodicals, such articles as might while away and amuse an idle hour. She could speak lucidly of what she read, but with no marked critical acumen. Nevertheless she had opinions. She was one of those women whose household is well ordered. She had taste; she loved her flowers and her garden. Nurtured in luxury, she was more simple than extravagant. All her pleasures had been innocent. Mrs. Fenton was not given to speech; in fact, she was usually silent. A good listener, she was interested, but hardly sympathetic. She lacked the imagination requisite to this last quality. She pitied suffering, because she was essentially womanly,

but she did not strongly realize its throes. With men she was reserved and even shy. In her intercourse with them she was perfectly natural, absolutely free from all artificiality. She had escaped the half-kittenish, half-humiliated challenge of the middle-aged woman who will not abjure conquest. This painful exhibition of moral weakness has doubtless often driven serious men from drawing-rooms. Was it this entire absence of vanity in a woman of his world which first piqued and then enchanted Mr. Trevor?

II.

CERTAIN it is that upon the evening when she blushed such a white-rose pink and looked up at Mr. Trevor with her little half-smile on the corner of her pure lip, the man felt the strangest thrill traverse his heart. It left him shaken as if a knife had struck and pierced right straight into his breast. He had not known such an emotion for many years. It worried him all the way home. He was six or seven years older than Mrs. Fenton, but he had all the vanities of a much younger man. He dressed youthfully; he not only followed, but led all the newest fashions. He chose for his friends men twenty years younger than himself, and, in the world, affected to devote himself to extremely young women. He was secretly annoyed if at dinner-parties he was placed between two dowagers, preferring the youthful crudity of brides and maidens of eighteen to the prestige of important and commanding personalities. If the idea of a second marriage had presented itself to him, he would have instantly selected a woman of the age of his youngest daughter. It seemed, therefore, incredible to him that the slightest attraction of sex could exist in a woman who had just

acknowledged herself half a century old. It was preposterous, even unpleasant. He drove away the memory; yet it returned to haunt him. He dreamed of her at night, of those deep eyes in whose soft and quiet depths one might find peace and pardon,—nay, consolation for a misspent and frivolous past.

On the next Saturday he met her again. He found himself unexpectedly and unaccountably agitated. She was not in the room when he arrived. He hoped she would not come. But when she did not, he could hardly repress his sorrow and his dismay. He told himself he was a great fool, mourning or no mourning, to make an old fogy of himself with these bores, and the only person who was worth coming to meet evidently tired with the entertainment herself! She did come, at last. . . . And when his eyes were again raised, it was in fear lest hers should not be kind. They were neither kind nor the reverse. The unconscious object of his week's reveries had been sublimely forgetful of his very existence, and she looked at him now very much as she looked every morning at the gray cat that came to get its milk at her white hands. The particular animal which Mr. Trevor represented to her had, in her estimation, a somewhat undesirable complexion.

She had heard things said against him, and, as an intelligent and wicked cynic has told us, "Calumniate boldly, for some of it will stick;" some of it had been sufficiently bold and had in this case "stuck." She considered him a foolish sort of fellow, affecting the airs of youth, given to foppery and to other less innocent pursuits. She decided that his early success in affairs had been more the result of chance than the fruits of character, which shows that she was, in fact, not clever. There are few chances in the course of

events, and those who seize them to their own advantage are the able ones of earth. On the whole, however, she had thought of him very little.

Mr. Trevor did not relish being treated and looked at in this way. It vexed his spirit of *charmeur*, for it must be said that if there were those who, through envy or malice, laughed at him, he had laid successful sieges, in his day, to feminine hearts, and was still quite capable in such investment of victory. He was good-looking, elegant, a prince with money, full of sympathy, and had that species of vitality which, in spending itself, seems to bring cheer into dulness, life into lethargy. His faults, such as they were, had been more harmful to himself than to others.

One morning Mrs. Gardiner Fenton was sitting alone on her veranda, with a book idly lying upon her knees. Visitors were scarce at any time in her secure retreat, under her trees, and at this hour almost unheard of. Her son, a rising architect, the only one who still lived at home, had gone into the city, as he did daily. Her household cares had been dismissed for the day; she had ordered her carriage, to pay some visits in the afternoon. Now she was debating whether she would go into the garden and look after her flower-beds or stay quietly and finish her novel in the shade of the flapping awning. It was a warm morning, so warm that she had ventured to sit out. There was a suggestion of approaching summer in the breeze.

Suddenly a hack from the neighboring station rolled in at the gate. It appeared and disappeared several times through the shrubbery, until it finally drew up at the steps. A man sprang out. The butler hurried through the hall. From her place of vantage she could see them both. She recognized her visitor. It was Mr. Trevor.

A moment later he stood beside her. He murmured something about being in her neighborhood "on business." Now, Mr. Trevor had long since retired from active affairs. This perfunctory explanation was accepted, however, without comment. Mrs. Fenton remained unflustered and undisturbed. She did not run in for a veil, smooth her hair, ring for a lace parasol. She stayed exactly where she was, with a streak of harshly revealing sunlight falling on the part above the fine texture of her pale forehead and playing havoc with such loveliness as time had left to her. The fretwork of lines about the bistre orb of her large eyes darted out in bold relief. Her eyelids were heavy and a little red; her cheeks were white. After a while, the warmth of the sun, or perhaps some other warmth, she wotted not, brought into them that glow which his roses had first left there, and which, to Mr. Trevor, seemed ineffably pathetic. Whence sprang that mysterious blooming, whose roots lay somewhere in the soul? In his? or hers? No fresh and peach-like bloom upon a child's young face; no rich, bright promise of dawning maidenhood; no burning tell-tale flush of passionate womanhood had seemed to hold for him one-half the majesty, significance, and fascination of the lost color on this faded lady's cheek.

Lost! lost! And did it not come back for him, and would he not find, nay, fix it there forever? As he looked at its fluctuation, at the tired eyelids, and bathed in the reposeful lull of that strange influence which she alone exerted over him, there arose in the man's heart, to choke and strangle him, a curious sensation. His hands trembled, his ever ready flow of verb and adjective, of exclamation and compliment, expired in the utterance. He felt a sudden longing to fall at her feet.

What should he say to her? The question clove him. It acted upon him like a cold douche. He pulled himself together, and talked of the weather, the news in the morning *World*, for which its editor had paid his thousands, while she invited him with cold formality to stop and breakfast.

"No, I will not intrude longer upon you, I only stopped in passing; forgive the intrusion. Pray, accept these violets."

He detached, as he spoke, his large boutonnière, and gave it into her hands.

"I am off to the train; I shall breakfast at my club when I arrive. Good-by—farewell."

She urged him no further, and they parted. She expressed no surprise at his sudden invasion. To him her reticences seemed more pregnant than words. They made her sublime to him. She had no fussiness, no assertiveness, none of the woman's tormenting and excessive desire for talk, argument, parlance. Had she felt annoyance at his visit? In vain he racked himself as he thundered home over plain and ditch in the smoky, stuffy train.

Had she?

When he left her, she remained for some time with her hands folded together in her lap. The wind blew her hair about. In her mind was this thought: "I knew he would come, but hardly fancied that it would be so soon." And then she rose and went into the house.

So Beatrix had guessed her power. She had seen that he trembled. Did she like it? After a while a frown gathered in two sharp lines between her eyes, "One wouldn't like to be made ridiculous," she murmured, as she moved about her room. But she did

not, as nearly every woman would have done—glance into the mirror, no, not once.

He, in the mean while, found himself continually possessed by her image. She seemed to him like that sister of Alcina and Morgana who taught Ruggiero to master the hyppograff with book and horn. Ah! wondrous potency! And when he remembered Jessie Fallon, it was with a shiver of mingled disgust and shame! If she should know, even guess what his life had been! She, his only friend! He thought of her thus, as a friend, ay, a divinity, at whose altars one might long to bring an humble offering and to pray.

His daughter Mattie was surprised on the following Sunday when her father suggested driving with her to church. He continued to attend in the family pew regularly after this. It had been a source of regret to his woman-kind that "papa" had "no religion;" but now he became suddenly devout and asked odd questions upon theology and the ritual,—questions which rather bothered the young woman herself. He remembered that his mother had had him confirmed when he was twelve years old, and it was with some compunction that he turned away from the altar and joined the outgoing crowd upon the day of communion.

About this time the lady whom I have called whimsical, and whose name was Mrs. Urquhart, dropped in to see Mr. Trevor's daughter one afternoon. During this visit she led the latter to understand that her father was a frequent visitor at Mrs. Fenton's place.

"You had better look out for your papa, my dear," she said. "He is quite infatuated."

Mattie was greatly amused. But when the report took shape and substance, and rolled up, and every-

body began to talk about it, she ran around to see her married sisters.

"Well, I don't know what we are expected to do about it," said young Mrs. Fothergill. "It is better than it might have been; she is a lady; but, of course, it is all nonsense."

"A lady?" said Mrs. Gregory Gray. "I, for my part, think she is disgracing herself."

"Why, I don't suppose, sister, that such an idea has ever entered her head. She is the quietest poke of a woman," said Mattie. To her, her father's future was of more importance than to her sisters.

"Pshaw, they are the worst when they get going," said Mrs. Fothergill; "I hear that papa heaps her with flowers and things."

"She must be encouraging him frightfully," said Mrs. Gregory Gray. "I should think Mary and Lola would be just furious." These were Mrs. Gardiner Fenton's daughters.

"She is probably a designing woman," said Mrs. Fothergill, decidedly.

They had been brought up to the view that all behavior was right or wrong, correct or incorrect, as if it were not much else beside these! Have not rare flowers of exquisite breath sprung up in wretched soil? Have not gracious things thriven out of disorder?

"All Lola and Mary care about is amusing themselves," said Mrs. Fothergill.

"Why, she must be nearly a hundred," said Mrs. Gregory Gray.

"She is a lovely-looking woman for all that," said Mattie, "and father is most changed——"

"Changed! Fol-de-rol," said the others in concert.

"He was always good enough for me," said Mattie,

a little hotly. "I never thought dear mamma understood him."

The sisters parted with a certain consternation.

That very day a man and woman were walking slowly beneath the shadows of a leafy arbor; she was leaning lightly on his arm; he had a rapt look; they were in earnest conversation, or at least he was speaking. It was always he that spoke, and she that listened. This listening had become unconsciously to herself a part of her life. Mr. Trevor had continued his visits. The plea of business had soon been dropped from these strange love-trysts. Sometimes he stopped only an hour, sometimes half the day. They breakfasted then *en tête-à-tête*, took a quiet drive across the fields, or sat in the garden together. He never spent a night; he was not asked to do so. He sent gifts of flowers, books, bonbons. She thanked him, no more. She never wore the flowers; they were disposed in vases in her drawing-room where all might see and enjoy them. She was a woman who did not seek herself even in this homage that was poured so lavishly at her feet.

III.

To-day he was as usual pouring out his heart to her. "It was the most curious thing," he was saying, "the effect produced upon me that very first night that we met, by your lightest word. You had the queerest influence over me. I wanted to weep. When with you I feel as if I were in church; that is why I have begun to go to church again; it brings you near. Why, I haven't prayed since I was a child."

She sighed and remained silent.

"I want to tell you everything, but I dare not. I

fear to revolt and disturb you. My dear creature, you have no idea what you have done for me. Why, my life was worth nothing to me, and you have lifted me right up. You just looked across the table at me and spoke some gentle word, and I was aghast at myself, at the world. Am I boring you?"

He paused, hesitating. She shook her head.

"My poor wife was an excellent woman, excellent; immensely clever; a great woman. But there was no sympathy between us; we could not pretend to it."

Then he uttered this cry: "Ah, why didn't we meet before, you and I!"

"It is surely not too late for us to be very good friends," she said to him softly and lightly.

His fingers sought and closed over her own. "Friends, Mrs. Fenton? Shall it never be more?"

"Would you render me absurd?"

"Absurd!" He flushed to the roots of his forehead. "This is all my feeling means for you—absurdity?"

"It means," she said, "more than you know."

"My God! Dear, dearest, will you not put this dear little hand in mine forever, then? Will you not marry me?"

"I shall never marry again."

"And is this your last word?"

"My last word."

"What do you mean to do with me, then?"

He looked so forlorn, with a sort of boyish discomfiture so incongruous in a man of his years and assurance, that the ghost of that fleeting smile which spoke to him a language none other should ever read—he liked this monopoly—rose to her mouth.

"Why, why," she faltered, "I am not the arbiter of your fate."

"Are you not?"

"You frighten me."

"What a child you are!"

Then they both laughed, she a little mournfully.

"Indeed, indeed, by what right, Mr. Trevor, do you put this responsibility upon me?"

"Dear, let me tell you; it just came; I cannot explain it. But it is true what I say, that you seem a child to me; you are not in the least the sort of woman I ever admired before. I must always tell you the plain truth; I must be frank. If any one had told me that I should love a saint—— But that is just it. I hate now every woman who is not just like you; and there are none, so, you see, I am your slave."

"Hush."

"Can I come again next Monday?" It was usually on a Monday that he came to see her. She gave him no answer.

"Let me come, let me come! Do not drive me away; see, I will not tease you; I will do you no harm," he said, with heat.

"Yes, come, then."

"Will you take my arm to the end of the walk? Lean on me; it cheers and comforts me a little bit."

He guided her with tenderest homage and respect to her own door.

"*Au revoir.*" He waved his hat to her and he walked away.

"Good-by."

It was almost a weariness to her, this excitement. And yet, and yet, she did not break with him, not entirely. She told herself that she was very weak.

Her daughters spoke together of "mamma's adorer," and asked her once some questions. Her son wrote to

his brother in the West: "Old Trevor is sweet on the mimmy; sends roses and such like. What a comedy!"

He viewed the whole affair as a vast joke; he certainly could not take seriously the thought that his mother was indulging in a flirtation, and as to marriage, the mere idea would have sent him into uproarious laughter.

Nevertheless, Mr. Trevor continued to come. He looked thin in these days, and worn; his appetite was gone. One day he complained of feeling poorly, of palpitations. Mrs. Fenton ministered to him; made him a warm draught herself; arranged a pillow on the sofa behind him; hovered about him as women do on such occasions.

Her breath, sweet as an infant's, touched his hot brow.

When he left that day, he pressed her hand in his at parting. Did he feel a slight, very slight pressure in return?

All the way home he tortured himself with the question: Had she really pressed his hand, or was it all imagination? Being pessimistic, where she was concerned, he was inclined to think himself the dupe of his desire. With all the beautiful, sparkling and even naughty young women whom he had known in his life, he had felt none of this self-distrust. It had been left to this woman of fifty to make him humble. He lived in constant fear of shocking her delicacy or of disturbing that soft serenity which he revered. He remembered the sensitive lines of her face, the reserve of her manner, and wished he might go back and look up forever into those sweet, sad eyes.

He liked to be teased about her; he laid traps for

such teasing to his daughter. When Mattie asked him if he had been to Mrs. Fenton's, he would answer enigmatically, like a very school-boy proud of a first love-affair. His other daughters maintained a cold silence with him on the subject, and an attitude of marked disapproval; but Mattie was beginning to sympathize. Who knows? perhaps Mattie had fathomed under the flippancy of her father's exterior, the unspoken tragedy of a lonely heart,—a heart bursting with affection and constantly rebuffed, craving happiness in the emotions and fighting blindly to satisfy them.

If it is hard for a rich man to penetrate into heaven, —and we have high authority for the assertion,—it is equally difficult for him to conquer love for himself and not for the benefit which he may confer. Mr. Trevor may have guessed this. Hand seeks hand; heart pants for heart. This desire for requital cannot be sinful, since to the human the human was given. The answer to man's cry of loneliness was the incarnation.

"She does not care for him, poor papa," thought Mattie, and she felt sorry. She had always been prone to think of him as "poor papa,"—why, she could not have made clear. He was so different now. Mattie was penetrating the hidden motor of this change. Even the beloved club was almost abjured. He still dressed scrupulously, but with less dandyism; and his jovial manner had gained a certain dignity, more becoming a man of his age. She did not think, however, that he looked well in health, and she spoke of this to her sisters.

Two days after his last visit, some flowers came by express addressed to Mrs. Fenton; they were still wet, as though with dew; among them lay, in a tiny envelope, a card. Upon it was written:

"To the sweetest woman on the earth, from her grateful and devoted servant."

She read it over two or three times.

"It is extraordinary," thought she; then she added, after a pause, "What a perfect gentleman he has been to me!"

She began to ponder over his visits and to wonder, if they were discontinued, how greatly she would miss them. With a certain unexplained presage of loss, "I should miss them," she thought. Her sudden appreciation of her dependence on him was not expressed in dramatic phraseology. Perhaps it was no less forcible. Dithyrambs belittle.

The lamps were brought in. One of the servants came with the mail. She turned indifferently to the evening paper; she would have time to scan its headlines before her boy arrived, and it should be the hour to dress for their dinner.

A name on the first page arrested her hand; her eyes closed, and then opened, dilating in swift terror. It only took her a moment to scan it all. Mr. Trevor —the announcement was made duly sensational—had fallen dead, of the heart, at his club that afternoon, as the journal she held was going to press. His body still lay there, unclaimed by his family, in one of the upper chambers. There were various hideous details upon which the paper gloated.

She seemed to see the awful loneliness of the figure on this club bed. She could realize its stiffness under the sheet with which they had covered it. She remembered the warm clasp of his hand upon her own. How did it look now?

Her son arrived. He kissed her. He spoke of Mr. Trevor's death. He gave her a few more particulars.

"You will miss his visits, mother," he said, kindly; "he seemed awfully fond of you; he wasn't half a bad fellow. Let me see,—he can't have been sixty; he was a vigorous-looking man. Bless me! did he send you all those roses to day?"

She said, "Yes," and then her son left her. She threw a lace scarf over her hair, a wrap about her shoulders, and went out into the dark.

The twilight was over. The moon was rising; it shone rayless, opaque, between the trees, like some great ball of blood-red brass. There were driven clouds in the sky, but the wind made no sound; over all lay the brooding stillness of the creeping night. The air was a little chill, and she drew the lace up closely under her chin. She hurried down the leafy alley, where they had walked so often, he pleading his suit, she listless, saying nothing, often cold, hardly ever really kind,—always thinking of her position, her children, the possible advent of a neighbor, the certain espionage of her servants; of what was ridiculous in the situation; of everything, in fact, except that a human soul had cried to her, and that she had answered its demands in so niggardly and miserly a fashion.

Chained, as are women of her type, by prejudice and custom, she remembered all the chivalrous devotion which, now for two long years of a life which was so quickly ebbing, he had lavished upon her. He, a man whose name a hundred women would have been glad and proud to bear! Then suddenly she thought,—

"I will be nicer to him next Monday. I will explain——"

Then a swift pang shot through her veins, and she knew that the Monday would come, and then another,

and yet another, but that no Monday, now or ever hereafter, would bring her friend and lover back to her side,—never, never, never again. A sudden anguish she could not account for, a sense of something irrevocable, final, bottomless, hopeless, inaccessible, held her in its grip, and a voiceless, smothered cry rent her breast. Tears gushed from her eyes—sad, bitter waters —which fell upon her hands and seemed to wither them.

To her children, no doubt, she was valuable and dear. Her Western son wrote to her of his ventures in cattle and horses, of his new granges for wheat, of the sheep, their shearing, their health and diseases, of the fresh tracts of land he wished to add to his already increasing acres. He had asked her to advance money to him for this purpose. Her daughters told her of their pleasures; she was a constant witness of their happiness and prosperity. When she went to their homes, she found them full of plans and projects; they had hardly time to listen to her own. One of them was building a house; the other was soon to become a mother. These things filled the whole horizon of their world. Her youngest son, when not engaged in the ardent pursuit of his career, was quick to seize the latch-key and hurry to a neighboring country-seat, where a pair of bright eyes fascinated and held him, so late, sometimes, that his mother, tossing wakeful, feared some harm had come to his horse and himself upon the lonesome highway.

Yes, she was precious, no doubt, to these, as we are prized by those to whom we listen patiently, claiming no great return of sympathy and interest. Her few relatives, her neighbors, had for her a mild regard. She was to them a habit, a pleasant one—perhaps.

She knew that they discussed her faults together, with an insistence not devoid of a pleasurable note. She knew it, as we know certain things intuitively,—knew that they said she was lazy, devoid of proper ambitions, lacking in hospitality.

The world she had allowed to pass by. To it she was indifferent, and, therefore, it was beginning to ignore her. She had been a little surprised to find herself once or twice uninvited to some great function at which, when her daughters were still with her, she would surely have been bidden. To-night, in the midst of this emotion, the memory of this slight arose and stung her. Was she being forgotten, forsaken, left out?

Demosthenes tells us that old and insignificant sprains and wounds revive to give us pain when some new malady befalls us.

There was no doubt of it, then, to the world; yea, even to her children, she was, after all, but an old woman,—to be cared for, no doubt; to be loved within limits. To the latter she would soon become a cause of solicitude,—who knows? perhaps an incubus. But she knew that to him she had seemed young and beautiful. He had craved her companionship beyond all other. In it he had been invigorated and elevated. He had held her hand in his, and its touch had given him strength.

For the first time in her life, despair fell upon Mrs. Fenton,—such despair as she had never reached before; no, not at her husband's grave had her lament been so irremediable. Then she had still possessed the protecting affection of a mother, and her own children had been dependent and helpless. She herself, in those days, had been young and strong. The loneliness of

age came forth and stood and looked at her now with hungry, eager eyes. It pulled at her skirts, blanched her cheek, laid its chill upon her forehead. To the man who was dead her very presence had brought a benediction. He had never forgotten her. To him she had been most lovable, and, if she had seemed young to him, in his presence she had indeed felt so. She thought if he were only near now, she would lean just for one moment upon his breast and cry, "Forgive, forgive, forgive!" and at least thank him once for loving her so much.

But she would never so speak to him, because he was dead. He had thought that he owed her gratefulness, but she knew now all he had given to her and how little she had given to him. He had often asked her—childishly, she had then thought—to call him by his Christian name, and she had as often refused, moved by that conventionality which had always been the main-spring of her every action. Now she suddenly kneeled upon the damp grass and with streaming eyes called him by his name, first in a whisper, then more loudly,—nay, by every tender appellation that a loving woman can invent with which to invoke an absent loved one whom she has wronged and pained. She leaned her head against a tree-trunk, and it was here, in desolation, that she sobbed forth to him a last farewell.

She did not appear at dinner, and her son did not intrude upon her privacy that night.

* * * * * * * * *

In the Trevor household there was great confusion. Hurriedly summoned, young Mr. Trevor and his handsome wife, Mrs. Fothergill in her rich dinner dress, Mattie with her hair upon her shoulders, Mrs. Gregory Gray in a tea gown, were gathered together where the

father lay. A physician and nurse were undressing the lifeless body, which an ambulance had, by special permission, been allowed to remove to the dead man's home.

"There's some hard substance here against the heart," said the physician.

"Why, it is a picture!" said Mattie's husband, with foolish surprise.

Mrs. Fothergill, frowning, took it from her brother-in-law's hand. It was a photograph of Mrs. Gardiner Fenton. It represented her as many years younger than she now was, sitting on a balcony, in a somewhat strained and sentimental pose, for which the artist, not the model, was evidently responsible. Mrs. Fothergill made a slight grimace through her tears:

"It is that . . . that woman; what shall I do with it?"

"Give it to me," said Mattie.

* * * * * * * * *

Upstairs, the poet, a few hours later, was sitting in his pajamas at his desk, writing an "Ode to Death." He had penned the first two lines, but could get no further. His bare feet, which were thrust into the same slipper, were cold; his brain vacuous.

"The critics," he reflected, bitterly, "no doubt think an Ode to Death a very easy thing to throw off; but I'll be hanged if it is as much of a joke as they imagine. If it is, I wish they'd just come on and do it themselves." . . . "And I'm nearly frozen, too," he muttered, after a pause, under his breath.

He hoped that Mattie would not come to the door and find him there. She might think him heartless. At such a moment he could hardly make her understand the extreme coyness of his muse and that he

dared not discourage her advances when she was in the least amiable.

But Mattie was not thinking of her lord. At midnight, when the lone watcher, whose duty it was to be wakeful, had fallen into a doze, the young woman stole in on tiptoe, looking like a ghost in her long, white peignoir. She neared the bed where lay her dead father, and, quickly opening the shirt which covered his heart, she thrust the photograph again upon his silent breast, under the flowers which already profusely covered it. The hastily procured waxen tuberoses and violets filled the apartment with their cloying sweetness.

"There, dear, you shall have her," she said, in a tone with which one would grant a favor to some fretful and indulged child; and, as she spoke, she laid a tender hand upon those sunken eyelids which never more would flutter at her approach.

Raking Straws

I.

SHE was a pretty little girl, quiet of speech and gesture, seemingly fond of order, systematic in her studies; but there were those who said that when she did romp—which was seldom—she romped to wildness. After these infrequent ebullitions she relapsed once more into absolute calm. She was reputed to be silent; hence great surprise, on one occasion, when she arose to justify an accused companion, and indulged in a burst of eloquence that cleared the unjustly criminated culprit, and covered herself with blushes and glory. Weary Miss Bell, who taught us good English and high art, came down from her "form" and passed a gentle finger over Madeline's hair; and Monsieur Pallain, the French professor, wept, blowing his nose loudly on his purple cotton handkerchief. "She has a generous heart," he said, snuffling, "and the dramatic instinct."

This last suggestion bore fruit in a remarkable performance of Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar." Enveloped in sheets draped to represent togas, some worn rakishly, with the "loose girdle," commemorative of

the hero himself, we assumed the *rôles* of the Roman conspirators. One young lady brandished the kitchen poker—loaned by the cook, Mrs. Lemon—in lieu of a dirk, while she rent the air and our souls by her adjurations to "Friends, Romans, Countrymen!" The said Mrs. Lemon, it must be admitted, did not rise to the occasion, but tittered audibly and frivolously from a neighboring door-way, where a number of maids were heaped up and gaping. In the mean while, Madeline, pointing tragically with her little rosy thumb to the flaunting red of a tattered table-cloth, hissed in piercing accents which thrilled the expectant audience, while her girlish face was drawn like that of a young faun in pain: "*See* what a rent the envious Casca made!"

Once more Madeline covered herself with laurels, relapsing the next day into her usual repose.

Monsieur Pallain had been greatly impressed: he predicted that, if she should make the stage her career, Rachel's successes would be but a shadowy intimation of Madeline's fame. "She subjugates!" he said. "She appeals to the heart. This appeal has no year, no period, no fashion. A mere representation of modern society—that is ephemeral. We must touch the humanities. They have no age. She is a great *tragédienne*." Some girls who did not like Madeline declared that Monsieur Pallain was prejudiced. They concluded that a verdict upon all achievement, as upon beauty, must be something higher than the expression of mere personal predilection or distaste.

It was difficult, after such amusements, to put our minds upon our lessons. Julius Cæsar had demoralized us—a way of his with women, Suetonius tells us. A lecture on archæological research, given to us by a well-known professor of history, we found somewhat

archaic. He told us about twelve thousand mounds and six hundred excavations which had recently been made. He gave us most interesting information concerning the abodes of dwellers in the stone age, their artificial and natural grottos, and the money which they used. He threw in the periods of iron and brass; but I fear we were extremely inattentive. We found him tame.

There is no doubt that Madeline had risen to considerable importance. She was criticised, but sought after. Feminine creatures never slight or neglect the rival of whom they are really afraid. Alva Greene, who was the most beautiful, the most spoiled, and the richest girl in the class, did her the honor of inviting her to a clandestine party in her room, to eat sponge-cake and Japanese persimmons, at four o'clock. The product of this small but fruitful bush met with great favor. Madeline, who was usually a gourmet, convicted herself, on this occasion, of being a gourmande; she devoured eight of the juicy fruits, and was ill in consequence. But she recovered. To be hurt is not to be injured. The persimmons were not intended to prove fatal.

These divagations and tendencies to extremes are an index to character. Later, I remembered them, pondering over the small and tiny rills from which great waters are compressed into dangerous floods. Childhood is sweet and pallid as April, and its memories must needs be of trivial things.

I remembered Monsieur Pallain's words to Madeline still more vividly when I heard that she was contemplating going on the stage. This was a mere rumor, a ripple from her world to my own. Several years had elapsed since we had left Miss Bell's school. We lived

in different cities; we had drifted apart. It was said that this desire on her part had caused a quarrel with her family, that her father had died, cutting her off from all share in his fortune. He belonged to that old-fashioned school of parent who considers that any form of restlessness or ambition in a female thing marks her as a Delilah. As such, therefore, he saw fit to advertise her to an ungenerous world.

Then came a brief silence about her, until we read one morning in the papers that she had suddenly married a naval officer, and gone with him to the South Pacific, or the North pole, or some other equally dispiriting region. She drifted into port once more, about five years later, her sails a little wind-worn, her anchor a trifle rusty, her rigging somewhat strained,—in other words, she came back and was "talked about." The naval officer had proved a poor investment. People said he had been coarse and intemperate; at any rate, Madeline had found him so. There had been unhappiness, an unhappiness not untinged by a breath of scandal. Madeline had lovely eyes. It seems that the commander's first lieutenant had told her so; and it was while she was repudiating the charge that her husband entered her presence, they said, and brandished a revolver. It had all ended in ridicule cast upon himself. It had been proved that there was nothing whatever, except that he was very drunk. And in a wild debauch, shortly after this, he went to his reckoning and left her—free.

I heard she was passing through New York eighteen months afterwards. I went to see her. It was then she told me she had never loved the man, her husband; but she had pitied him. She was stopping in two modest ground-floor rooms in a lodging-house on a

quiet street, and there I found her one damp afternoon. She told me she thought she should stay all winter. When I was announced, she was sitting by the fire, alone. Her little dog, who had just come in, and smelt of the rain, was warming himself on the hearth-rug at her feet. I recall perfectly how she came forward to meet me with outstretched, welcoming hands, and her fair hair and her winning voice. She made upon me a strong impression of charm. When I had been with her a half hour, I was convinced that she was the most innocent of women, and the most wronged. Her family had been unkind to her. They had disliked her thought of the stage, and they had disliked her marriage; she laughed and said, "After the manner of families." And then, just when they had forgiven her, there was the trouble with her husband, and a second quarrel with her relatives; and this time she was herself less easily placated. "I will let them alone!" she said, with a vibration of anger in her voice. "There's room enough in your big town for my obscurity and my insignificance. Let them give me peace; that is all I ask."

She admired me very much; what she was pleased to call my beauty, the tones of my voice, my pretty gown, my furs, in fact, everything that I wore. She stroked my hands and said singular and flattering things to me. Her manners were dignified and gentle. When I rose to depart she ran to the table, and took some red carnations from a vase, and tied them into a nosegay for my corsage. "It was a queenly thing for you to do, to come to me so soon," she said. "Tell your husband I must see you now and then. It can do you no hurt; it would be life to me in my dulness. I have very little money, you know, although the commander did, in the end, leave me

something. But it is not enough for me to attempt your world, even if I would." As I approached the table, offering her my handkerchief to dry the stems of the dripping flowers, I noticed a photograph which reposed under her lamp, in a handsome gilded frame. It looked familiar to me. I stopped to examine it, and uttered an exclamation of surprise. It was the portrait of Templeton Vane, a young bachelor and intimate friend of my husband's, and a sufficiently good friend of my own. It was not until I got into my brougham that I wondered why Mr. Vane himself had never spoken to me of his acquaintance with Mrs. Avery. I remembered talking of her in his presence once, at our table, and that he said no word. I had made the remark that Mrs. Avery seemed to me to possess one of those profound and moving natures that attach and that are rarely forsaken, and that I believed her reserved for some favorable turn of fortune. To this he had replied nothing. I had not insisted. He was not one of those who inspire us to discuss characteristics. His was a keen but vulgar intelligence. His sympathies, if he possessed any, dwelt for me in inaccessible places of his soul. He was of an *insouciant*, generally amiable humor, egotistical without pronounced vanity, self-satisfied without anxieties or revolts of temper. Of a superb health and physique, he was not one of those highly organized beings in whom sensation becomes, in its extreme, pain. Like Montaigne, he was capable of going to sleep on the pillow of doubt. He was conceited about his taste, thought his ideals in art high, because he had been disappointed in Venice, and disillusioned by the pyramids, which, he said, "were poor work after all."

This is a long parenthesis. When I saw his photo-

graph on Madeline's table, I asked her point blank where she got it.

"Why, Mr. Vane gave it to me."

"Ah!"

"He was on the ship with me from Savannah, last year," she said, vaguely.

"And you see him?"

"O comme ça—now and then. He has called." I scanned her narrowly. She flushed. I felt like apologizing. I did not ask her what she thought of him, but I remembered his mamma, and wondered if a warning to her, to him, or to somebody, were not my duty.

I mentioned all these facts and my last dilemma to my adoring husband, on my way to a ball that night.

"Hum! Hum!" flowed this fountain of wisdom; "I should think much the best thing you could do was to keep out of the whole concern. A woman with a shadow on her; Mrs. Vane, a regular old dragon; and Templeton, the best hearted fellow in the world, but selfish through over-petting by the women."

I took up the cudgels violently for my old schoolmate. "A shadow on her! Are you not ashamed? What! A drunken, miserable husband, a horrid, nasty family, and now poverty and loneliness! And you want me to drop her? Never, never, never! Templeton is selfish, I know it. She'd have the worst of the bargain. As for him, he'd have good luck to get such a pretty wife." My husband pricked up his ears at this last remark. To the male a pretty woman is always a pretty woman. For a loving woman there is but one man living—her lover. For men the horizon is less contracted.

"Why don't you ask her to dinner? You were

complaining that married dinners were so stupid. A widow slips in conveniently in a party of twelve."

"Well!"

"Well, what?"

"I thought you didn't want me to play with her."

"Did I say so? You put the words in my mouth, dearest."

"Don't say 'dearest' in that glib tone; it annoys me. I thought you promised when we married to avoid conjugal platitudes. You are getting the marital whine."

"No doubt, I am a very ordinary man. You took the gentleman who loved you for a great personage, as every other woman has done since the world began, and now that your sentiment has changed you are disappointed." Then we kissed each other.

Later he said, "There's matter for quite a drama in this thing, if there's anything in it at all. Mrs. Vane would be furious. She expects Templeton either not to marry at all, or to get a prize,—like Alva Greene, for instance."

"Alva Greene! . . . You call that a prize?"

"What is the matter with Alva Greene?"

"Alva Greene is a serpent," I said, decidedly. Then we discussed the social era and politics, and drew up to the door of the palace, where the ball was already in full swing.

II.

FINDING my husband willing to be conciliated by my pretty friend, I drove to her lodgings one afternoon, to see if I could persuade her to dine with us. She expressed the determination of leading a retired life, and declared herself content with books and music, and a

few friends. Of Vane we did not speak again. I had seen him only in the world and respected his reticence. When I reached Mrs. Avery's door I was told that she was out. "She's out," said the Swede who opened it, "and she didn't left no word." But the landlady emerged from a distant corridor and contradicted him. She told me that orders had, upon the contrary, been left, that if I came I was to be asked to wait for a moment, as Mrs. Avery would be at home at five o'clock. I would find fire and light within. It was now only half-past four, but I determined to wait. I found a bright wood fire in the grate, its odor mingled gratefully with that of a huge bowl of hyacinths which ornamented the table. The lamp was lighted. I began to fumble over her books; a modern one upon the days of the Roman republic attracted me. I adore those calm antiquities; they lift up to us the torches that light the centuries; they rescue us from the poverty and meanness of our modern tinsel. I was soon lost in the enticing pages, drawing draughts of delight from the breath of those mountain summits of the past which, if criminal, at least were great. I became a pagan. I sang the song of early Italy. The cold fogs of my northern blood rolled away. I bathed in the amphitheatre's sunshine, and steeped myself in that turbulent life, so curiously crystallized upon the page.

Just then there was a creaking of the door, a wave of the *portière* which shrouded it. A man stepped across the threshold. Templeton Vane entered. I threw down the book which had so engrossed me. "I was just learning to fly," I said to him, "and your arrival clips my wings. I was reading about living creatures, —women with bodies and men with brains, and no

morals. I was reading the truth. Truth is immoral. Don't ask me how I liked the ball. There were only stuffed dolls present."

He laughed. "Do you think feeling died out in Nero's time?"

"How can I tell?"

He took off his coat, and seating himself at the table, began to play with the paper-knife. "I've a great mind"—after a moment's embarrassed silence—"to make a confession to you, since you are here, and, while we wait for Mrs. Avery." My heart gave a jump. I scented a love-affair. It seemed to promise piquancy. "I am very unhappy," he began, "perfectly miserable——"

"I don't believe a word of it." He laughed again; he had certainly an agreeable, gentlemanly laughter. Then I looked up at him with a certain archness which my husband has commended, and asked him abruptly, "Won't she smile on you?"

"We're attached to each other," he said, shortly.

"Ah . . . then . . . "

"That should be sufficient, should it not? And yet it isn't. She is the most extraordinary woman. You can't think. She says she cares for me, but feels we don't suit each other,—that I couldn't understand her,—that nobody ever has,—God knows what! I don't. She can't love me. Why! for a week of her I'd risk an eternity of wretchedness." I was amazed. I had not suspected him of so much fire. "She is the daintiest little creature,—the most adorable,—heavens! you can't fancy how lovable she is. Since I met her I have never budged,—never seen another woman. I don't know they exist; and here,—here she says 'I love you,' and yet insists she can't marry me—that she

is different from what I imagine her to be. It's all damned nonsense!"

"And your mother?"

"Oh, my poor mother! You know what she has been since my father's death. She shuts herself up with a lot of old cronies,—she sees so few people. I am everything to her, and——"

"Have you told her?"

He hesitated a moment, clearing his throat. "No, I haven't. Where's the use, until it's all settled?"

I shook my head. Our eyes met. He smiled a trifle whimsically. "Of course," I said, "there is going to be opposition."

"I suppose so," he answered, laconically; "but, of course, my own mind is made up."

"And you are quite right, but how——?"

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. It's a wretched business—a man of my age being entirely dependent on a woman—having to ask her for every sixpence I draw. But when I marry something must be settled definitely, or else—or else—I must go to work."

I looked at him. Somehow his words did not bring conviction. I didn't believe in his "going to work." With his mother's enormous income it seemed unnecessary and improbable. "You might enter politics or diplomacy," I ventured.

"Yes, I should like that—diplomacy—a foreign appointment. My mother's fond of travelling. She likes Europe. She could come to us." And it was just here that Mrs. Avery, with her eloquent shoulders draped in her Henri IV. cloak, and her wide hat tipped over her soft eyes, came in.

She greeted us cordially. She had been to a *mati-*

née at the opera house, with some friends, and appeared to be full of it. At least she began at once to tell us about it. She had just seen "Carmen." She was extremely enthusiastic about Don José, whose *rôle* had been confided to a certain Signor Valerio. "When he first came on," she said, as she loosened her wrap, and threw off her hat, "his physique indicated a lack of fitness for the part; but I knew at once that he was full of dramatic feeling,—of sentiment,—and I was not mistaken. He was marvellous in the last act. His portrayal of the enslaving power of passion was entirely free from Campanini's robust animalism. Oh, a masterly performance, no doubt, Campanini's; but this was all intensity, dignity, pathos, and imagination. It awoke a higher sympathy. He was a small man, slightly made, and he had the good taste never once to overreach himself, in voice or gesture. Where a part levies such a tax upon fierce expression, and where nature has denied powerful muscles, an athletic figure, it exhibits consummate skill to express emotion and not degenerate into hysteria. This tenor has won his laurels. He is very remarkable." It seemed to me she was talking to conceal embarrassment. Her utterance was rapid, somewhat breathless.

"You seem quite captivated," said Templeton Vane, looking annoyed.

"Oh, you know I am art mad. Give me perfect art, then I am at peace. People prate of morals in art, as if all high art were not morally our teacher. It elevates because it detaches,—like the lonely moorland, the far-off horizon, the wide expanse of the heavens, the sea."

"Certainly," I answered, carried away by her enthusiasm, "we do not ask their lessons of these; they

can be felt but never spelled. I am entirely of your opinion. After hearing beautiful songs, or seeing fine pictures, or conning a clever book, I realize that feeling of detachment from the paltry and the trivial. Then these things shake us up from our lethargy. They strengthen us, make us serene and disdainful of trifles."

"Oh, it ought to be enough for a life," said Mrs. Avery, drawing her chair up to the fire, and putting one foot out towards the flame, "to have been brushed by a breath of it across the lips! Now, Mr. Vane," she said, turning to him lightly where he stood a little forlornly near the mantelpiece, watching her,—he had risen as she entered,—"ring the bell, and let us have some tea, for after music the best one can offer is tea and cakes." The tea was brought, and there was a little more talk of music, and then Vane came forward not ungracefully, and taking her hands, "I have told Mrs. Leigh everything," he said. "Dear Madeline, let her congratulate us; tell her it is true. Tell her that you will care for me a little!"

She looked up, crimsoning. "You are not fair to me," she said.

"My child," I murmured, stepping quickly forward, "life is uncertain. Take a present joy; the future will care for itself." He leaned over her, just touching her hair; never have I seen two creatures more intoxicated by each other's presence. I wished to leave them; they were too wrapped up in each other for my intrusive presence. After all, it was the old picture, the sweet unravelled labyrinth called love. Such a tableau was enough; why seek conclusions? I said so to them as I donned my furs. It was she who detained me.

"Dear," she said, turning to him, "I am yours, and Olga is witness to my pledge. I knew last night it was

all over with my struggle. In the hours of the dawn I lay vanquished. So, now, be a good boy, and leave us for an hour. I have to speak with her. You may come back to-night. Now, go."

He whispered to her a moment, then obeyed her, radiant. Once alone with me, she passed her hand several times over her forehead, and then she came and sat herself down upon a low cushion close to my feet, nestling to me caressingly. I thought I had never seen her look so alluring. I laid one arm about her shoulders.

"I am a poor match for him," she said.

"But why, dear? Everything was explained . . . "

"You don't comprehend," she said; "it is the things I can't explain—not what has happened, but what I am—that will make it difficult."

"What you are?"

She smiled. "Don't look alarmed; I have not broken all the laws. It is my character. He doesn't read me aright; he doesn't know me."

"He says you are the gentlest, the sweetest . . . "

"Did he say that?" She frowned as if in pain, biting her lip.

"Yes, much more. He is so loving."

"No; he is not loving."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean—I mean—that I am fevered, wild, fierce, ungentle: and it is only one who is very loving—very—do you hear?—and very, very deep,—who would see me as I am, love me all the same, and make me happy. Oh, happy! To be happy! Shall I ever know it? And my heart not only hungers for it, but I want to give it. I know that I could give it! But to be given it must be understood."

"Why," I asked, speaking lightly through a certain uneasiness her words awoke in my breast, "what is this peculiarity of yours that a lover or a husband must fathom to gain delight?"

"My asperity, my jealousy, my exactingness,—I give so much,—too much! Olga, I adore him! Look at my arm!" She pulled up her sleeve. "It's thin with fretting and pondering. Bah! What a tragedy queen you must be thinking me!"

"Why don't you tell him all your fears,—speak out?"

"Every time I do we quarrel. This is what frightens me. He hates the truth. He wants everything to be smooth and calm. He cannot understand any other sort of affection, and I am afraid."

"I don't wonder you are afraid of his mother," I said, making up a grimace.

"If she is in the least kind, there will be no trouble."

"And if she isn't?"

"If she isn't, and Templeton lets me tell him the truth about her, I shall survive, and do her no harm. My only fear is that, with his peculiar nature, he would repel my confidences."

"Do you know that you used to seem very quiet at school? Your soft manner deceives."

"I am not; I must have expression or die."

"Why not? Who hinders you?"

"Ah, but with me it is a torrent! When it comes it alarms people. My family never could understand. If I had had a talent for writing, I think it would have been a safety-valve; it would have eased my heart. I had the dramatic element strongly latent; but they opposed that, naturally, no doubt, it was against all their traditions. So I hurried, in pique and anger, into

that miserable marriage, which meant for me only degradation. Oh, what I have suffered! But I bore that bravely enough."

"Yes, dearest, you were always eloquent. Do you remember your appeal at school for little Mary Janvier, and how you gained her pardon?"

She had risen from the floor, and was facing me, wreathing her two arms behind her head. "That was one of those moments when I had to speak. Injustice makes me insane."

"Oh, you are sane enough?"

"Sane like the engine when its steam is not stifled. Have you ever watched the machine getting ready for a start? how it snorts and trembles, how it cries in travail and pain? Then, when it moves off shivering, slowly, slowly, the relief, the tension relaxed, the power let loose, the sigh; and off it goes, majestic, through the pleasant, sunny fields, with that beautiful cloud of vapor behind it, marking its hidden track. Oh, that white cloud of its pathway, what dreams it gives to one! But imagine it, instead, compressed and heated to bursting,—no rosy vapor then, no fair journeyings, but blackened ashes, shivered iron, ruin, death!"

Her eyes shot forth flame as she spoke. Her slender body swayed, electrified, and I, borne on her words, could only clasp my hands and ejaculate, "Monsieur Pallain was right; you *are* a second Rachel!"

"Poor Monsieur Pallain!" she said, changing her tone in a moment to the colloquial, and helping herself to a macaroon, which she munched with gusto. "Do you remember his purple handkerchief? What a beautiful man he was, with his white teeth, his pink cheeks, his splendid curls, and those ridiculous eyelashes an inch long!"

"A clever head, too."

"Yes, but his appearance condemned him. He was absurdly good-looking."

"And Templeton?" I asked, smiling. "Is he absurdly good-looking?"

"He seems god-like to me."

"What do you mean, then, by saying he is not loving?" I was devoured with curiosity about these two.

"I can't explain. Don't ask it. He is in love with me, of course,—in his own fashion, without perception. Oh, I am sane with it all; you are right. But, sink or swim, the die is cast. I am his for ever."

III.

It was about two weeks later that I sat in my boudoir chatting with two friends, when Mrs. Vane was admitted. She came in with that somewhat supercilious stare which characterizes her, taking an inventory of the room, its furniture and decorations, its occupants, and, lastly, of myself and my personal adornments. She knew my visitors: they were Mr. Ackley and Mr. Atherton. The former commended himself to her snobbishness. The latter was a man too unqualifiedly desirable to demand explanation, upon the same principle, possibly, that *une jeune femme à la mode*, as Mme. de Girardin informs us, notwithstanding all her caprices, all the chagrins she may inflict upon us, is never *un paquet*.

Mr. Ackley is a bachelor of uncertain age, clever, well-read, polished. When his temper is roused he has a natural frankness which his enemies call brutality. This naturalness, which is but the outgrowth of a rugged

soul, is to my mind, on the whole, his chief attraction. It has lessons to teach which are not easily forgotten. He likes young men and young women, and his advice to them is tinctured by a caustic wisdom tinged with a beneficent philosophy. Himself an example of high honor, his precepts have no alloy of baseness. His good-natured satire is never ignoble. He is always a welcome guest in fastidious drawing-rooms.

My other guest was a widower of forty-eight, a man of independent fortune, and of leisure, who has for many years filled what in his own mind, at least, is the envied *rôle* of a man of fashion. He has two daughters whom he has piloted through the intricacies of the social arena with considerable tact and skill. He has made them, though not comely, belles. Not brilliant, he has taught them that *esprit de conduite*, which is a better guarantee to social success than the most acute intellect and the most regular features. He saw to it that they were always well chaperoned, well dressed, well turned out, and that their companions, of both sexes, were desirable not only in poise, not only in morals, but in the more delicate shadings of that social prestige which he deemed of paramount importance. This entirely feminine concern—of small moment to the average man—was partly the result of having been forced into a mother's watchfulness,—and in this aspect, pathetic,—partly born of a violent pride, whose only expression under Republican institutions was the fostering of an exalted exclusiveness. Of New England parentage, Mr. Atherton was imbued with that large share of Philistine conservatism which had, in his worldly environment, assumed the form of a supercilious disgust for everything . . . outside. This disgust was reflected

upon features which were in themselves peculiar. Mr. Atherton's enemies often said that he resembled an angry blonde lap dog. It is certain that at moments he had the petulance of a luxurious pet. Yet, although physical beauty was denied him, although his face was irregular, and his figure angular and nervous, his person was not devoid of a certain distinction. Self-conscious, he was too intelligent to be an egoist, and if his address lacked ease it was never uncivil. Scrupulously formal, he did not appreciate that a prince of the drawing-room can enter the presence of kings upon four paws and be instantly imitated. With all this, Mr. Atherton was not a fool. He was a man of more than average intellect. And under all, far down in the recesses of his being, there beat a heart full of an intense melancholy. This man had a craving for affection. It was his heart more than his intellect which spoke now and then, and shivered the frail fabric of his poor ambitions with a shock of self-contempt and a moment's derision. He was not devoid of a pale humor.

His conscience, which he had never lost, smote him for his idleness. His sensitiveness, which had crystallized into false pride, made of him an extremely unhappy man. He looked about him on a desert world, as Lermontof's demon upon the fleeting heights of Caucasus, telling himself that he had lived in vain, that his life was arid and futile. He was certainly uneasy and unsatisfied. His daughters felt for him a mixture of respect and fear, but little affection. They dreaded his displeasure, which was generally directed against some small social dereliction. He was too reserved to probe their minds and souls. Yet their lack of confidence secretly wounded him. He thought them un-

grateful for the many useful things that he had taught them. Had he not taught them to distinguish between a high-bred slight taken or given, or the rudeness of ignorance and crude Bohemianism? Had he not taught them the gift of silence, telling them that elegant women never chatter? How to snub their country cousins under a well-bred affability? How to flatter their important relatives without a suspicion of toadyism? Yet they remained cold!

He pitied his own lonesomeness in those silent chambers that each of us carries within himself, but which none reveals.

It was with these interesting men that Mrs. Vane found me. They did not remain very long. It was evident that the older woman had come for a *tête-à-tête*. She made it evident. The moment we were alone together, she broached the subject which was uppermost in both our minds. She drew her high-eared chair close to my reclining one, and immediately gave vent to an exclamation of woe. "Oh, Mrs. Leigh, will you tell me what is to become of me!" I opened my eyes and feigned astonishment, murmuring that I did not seize the situation. "You seize it perfectly; you know what I mean. You know of Templeton's infatuation for that—that—woman."

"If you mean Mrs. Avery," said I, "I do not accept that phrase applied to a personal friend of mine."

"Why, what do you know of her?"

"I have known her all my life," I answered, impatiently, "and I see no reason why a person who has been unfortunate should be branded as evil-minded."

"Well!"

"Yes; there is the whole matter,—she was unfortunate."

"I heard stories."

"And believed them, which is more to the purpose."

"I detest women who give cause for scandal."

"There has been no scandal." I was surprised at my own stanchness.

"No? I will take your word for it; this is a relief." There was, however, no relief in her tone, but rather a note of disappointment. Yes, unmistakably, Mrs. Vane wanted a scandal; she had called for it. Women dislike to be so cheated.

"No," I went on, "I am romantic. I believe in love. If they care for one another, then, that is everything." I became very bold, chafing under the ray of her empty eye. "And how do you know your son will give her happiness,—that which she has missed before? You have spoiled him, Mrs. Vane. I fear he is selfish."

She dropped her hands and could only again exclaim, "Well!"

"Yes, yes," I continued, quickly, "I know it is always the man's welfare that is considered in these matters; but it takes two to enter such a partnership, and I want my poor little friend to find joy. Ah, Mrs. Vane, be kind to her!"

"Why, the way you talk, one would think I was an ogress!" I looked at her delicate hand—she had drawn off a glove—laden with its beautiful rings, at her thin, white throat, at the line of her faint lips, at the fading oval of her yellow cheek, at the high, aristocratic brow, over which her lace veil was drawn up, dividing it like a knife with its sharp black line. I gazed upon the vertical wrinkle which lay under the rippling softness of her gracefully-brushed gray hair, and at her large vacant blue eyes; and I asked myself

if, indeed, she might not be an ogress, one of those terrible ones which dispatch their victims silently, crunching their bones swiftly and noiselessly, so that they shall make no cry or moaning. Yet she was only a good-looking, middle-aged lady, gentle of birth, soft of speech, and with a purr in her well-bred tones. "To me," she went on, "it is all quite dreadful. What, will you tell me, is to become of me when Templeton is married?"

"You must have expected it."

"Not now; and then, who could have imagined he would make such a choice? Were there not enough lovely young girls, that he had to give himself to a widow?"

So that was the trouble,—the fresh, unsullied purity of Templeton Vane was not to be breathed upon! I laughed in my sleeve. "Widows are proverbially dangerous," I said.

"I never was," said Mrs. Vane.

I believed her.

"I have always had a horror of flirtatious widows," she continued; "but, of course, what can you know of such sentiments? You are not a mother, you are a sort of goddess, dear Mrs. Leigh, a Diana. Yes, really, you look like—like the statues. You sail serenely. What can you know of our poor human conflicts and weaknesses?"

I murmured faintly that even the superb daughter of Latona, whom I could not aspire to resemble, had one day awakened to the fact that she too had a woman's breast. Then, after a pause—not in my character of an immortal, but moved by a very practical human curiosity—"Have you seen her?" I asked.

"Yes, I have seen her," she sighed. "I suppose I

was angry—prejudiced. I felt a sense of crime in her very clothes!"

"Oh!"

"I don't want to be disagreeable,"—this was evident,—"I admit I am a foolish mother. This has nearly killed me." She drew out a cambric handkerchief and began to cry softly. "You are right; he is selfish. You are not a mother. You don't understand these things."

I had my own doubts as to the future of the lovers. I had almost wished they might be persuaded to part; but this visit was fast making me their ally and champion.

"She angled for and caught him! There can be no doubt of that."

I flushed. "In this you are unjust; for only yesterday she was telling me of her own grave misgivings."

"Misgivings!"

"Yes; he has pursued her, and she has yielded, but not at once."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Vane, "of course, young men will be young men. They will pursue the woman who holds the *dragée haute.* She is clever, I don't dispute the fact,—cold, clever, and calculating."

"Now, do you know," said I, "I should imagine her passionate and generous."

"She has thrown dust into your eyes."

"Would you have him marry an idiot?"

"Alva Greene is not an idiot; and you know, Mrs. Leigh, I can disinherit him if I like. It is in his father's will." She drew from her muff a document tied with a red string, and began unfolding it. She had brought her husband's will! "Let me read you the fifth clause." Then she read there, in fact, that if her son should make

a marriage distasteful to her, she could leave the entire property of his father in other channels.

"Ah, but," I said, "you wouldn't do this. You wouldn't be so cruel!"

"I am distraught. I don't know what I should do. I shall consult my lawyer."

I told myself, when she finally rose to depart, that a man's hate is feeble to a woman's, if man's love, while it lasts, burns with a steadier flame. Which would triumph, her love or her hatred? For, after all, if she was a mother she would not persecute her child.

IV.

I WAS ill prepared by the events of the foregoing chapter for the exquisite peace, content, not to say hidden rapture, that I found upon the burning faces of my lovers when I met them again, three months later, as man and wife. They had then been married a few weeks only. I talked with them together; I talked with them singly and in pairs; and each could only dwell on the perfections of the other. But in such matters what people say to us is of small value; what radiates from their presence is paramount. They both looked superbly. They seemed filled to the lips with the upbubbling wine of life.

I found them occupying a handsome suite of rooms in a hotel, whence they were shortly to sail for Europe. After which Templeton vaguely spoke of returning to America and entering the field of politics or of affairs.

"I am ambitious for him," said Madeline, smiling up at him. "I want him to stand on his own merits—to snap his fingers at the world." She spoke a little tremulously.

He glanced at me and then at his wife, indulgently. "She imagines her pet crow to be an eagle!" he said, not without fatuity.

"You don't know, he has been an angel to me!" she whispered in my ear. "His mother . . . "

"Ah, yes, is she still hostile?"

"There is an armed truce," said Madeline, laughing, "which we hope to change into a permanent peace when we visit her on the other side. Don't you think she will forgive us when she sees us so happy—lay down her weapons of defence and of offence? We shall go to her directly."

"There is nothing to forgive."

"No, you are right. I am not meek by nature; I am proud. But one must be reasonable. She had other hopes; I blighted them. I must take time to win her to me—to us." Then she seized my hand and squeezed it, until the tears sprang from my eyes.

"Oh, God, I am so happy! You don't know—it is heaven! He is everything to me," she repeated. "I have often cursed my intellect, as it pleased God to give me one. I have thought that women who had only senses and hearts were the happiest; for they are slavishly devoted, and in this find satisfaction. With me there was so much to be satisfied. But there seems sympathy between us, yes, really." She gave out a faint smile. "We have talked and talked; there was so much to tell each other, such a flood of words after all these years that we were nothing to one another. There is hardly time left for loving, with all that we have to say." She spoke in a whisper to me, like one alarmed, eager to wrest from destiny a fugitive and fearful joy. "He has been so tender, so manly, and then, he never makes me jealous."

I listened to all that she said, as we do to the prattle of invalids or children. These vagaries of passion are as legitimate as law.

He accompanied me to the door. It was much the same story, if there was less poetry in his effusiveness. "Don't you find Madeline improved, looking handsome—eh? She is the sweetest creature! Don't you think my mother must love her?"

"I don't know!"

"How could any one help it?—if—if she shows tact."

"Who, your mother?"

"No, Madeline. She tells me she is quick-tempered. I see no evidences of it; she is a seraph. But my mother is peculiar. It will need patience. As to pecuniary matters, she is keeping a sphinx-like silence which is most exasperating. My allowance continues, and that is all I know about it. I shall do as Madeline suggests—come home in a year and make myself independent. This dependence on woman's whims is a cursed nuisance. You know she wouldn't come to our wedding. She left just before."

I commended his decision.

"If Madeline were mediocre, mother would have liked her. It is her superiority that provokes her. Everybody gets some praise. Blame only comes to people who are envied. Why, look at it in art! Who ever parodies mediocrity? You women are down on another when she is superior in charm. Why, she could have married anybody, and she took me!" He was full of that passionate partisanship which infuses and increases affection. A champion is an idolator. It was quite delightful. Love, flying past, had tipped his arrow and left it here. I was surprised, because I

had looked upon Vane as a somewhat self-indulgent young gentleman, and had feared this might be but the whiff of a new caprice,—a desire, common to man, for sweetmeats; sweetmeats placed just out of reach, and behind an altar that must be jumped over to get to them.

V.

It was eighteen months later that I met them again,—this time at a European watering-place. I had been persuaded into a wild mountain trip by a party of adventurous spirits, had worn narrow cloth gowns, tanned my nose (my best feature), neglected the roseate tips of my finger-nails, sprained an ankle caracoling over glaciers in high heels; and then had had them amputated—the heels, I mean,—and hobbled about with the tread of a dragoon or a British old maid; and now I was longing to find my boxes again, to array myself in soft garments, to put a diamond in my hair and a rose in my bodice. I began to realize the usefulness of conforming heart and intelligence to artificial institutions. We all have these swinging reactions. And then my lord and master was to meet me in this spot. A letter from Madeline Vane had informed me that she had a villa there, for a month, and they had begged me earnestly to pass it with them. I compromised with the promise of a three days' visit.

When our train pulled up it was already night. A man-servant spoke to my courier and told him Mrs. Vane was awaiting me in her carriage. I did, in fact, find her reclining in a pretty victoria, under the first rays of a benignant moon. It lighted up a captivating person in the form of my hostess. She sat erect, charmingly dressed, in a majestic attitude I had not

recognized in her before. Her greeting was affectionate, but reserved and composed. She impressed me like a person who was learning to stand on her feet. She had lost the liquidity which had once been a part of her loveliness. There was less impulse, possibly a shade of hardness. Yet, when I took my seat beside her, something about her was suggestive of inward agitation. The finest artificiality may convey an impression of unexpressed strength, of something underneath—dormant, if you will, but alive. I know not why, in that short drive from the station, I was imbued with the idea that Madeline Vane was acting a part. Women's intuitions need no further basis of belief. They are ; that is sufficient. She told me of the gayety of the place, of its cosmoramic revels, of the glitter and the bluster of the masquerade. There were foreign princes of wealth and of lineage, flaunting their feathers for applause and effect. There were impoverished noblemen in search of wealth and beauty ; fair Western heiresses, flirting with titled adorers, and Eastern business men, who took the baths for their livers, and read the *New York Herald* all day, tilting their chairs at their banker's, or sunning themselves under the hotel arcades. She wafted me agreeably through a gallery of character and situation.

When we reached the villa the moon was splendidly lighting its Grecian portico. It looked like a dream of Athens. It lay half-hidden in its fecundity of blossom. There was nothing of the middle-class or commonplace in the nest my friends had chosen. It stood apart—in silence and grace. 'Twas a fitting asylum for lovers. Here, too, a Socrates might have sat under quiet trees to indulge in restful reveries, nourishing himself on the pleasures of fine irony.

Within, the villa was equally attractive. The bro-

cade which hung the pretty room into which I was led from the antechamber was not too new. It had the delicacy which such things gain when they are a little faded. The tea-table was drawn close to the wax lights, and the roses of the portico wafted their scent through the windows. The hearth was filled with flowering plants. The suite of salons was redolent of perfumes, of soft and refined luxuries.

I was rather tired from my journey, yet not tired enough to disturb that recipient frame of mind which, possibly, in an active brain is best engendered by a slight fatigue of the nervous centres. Two women who have a great deal to say to each other, who are charged, as it were, burdened with topics, are apt to interfere with each other, if both are equally aggressive in speech. I sank back upon a lounge with a sense of delicious languor, breathed a little sigh, placed a cushion under my head, stretched out my feet and prepared to listen. My luggage had not yet come; it could not be here for an hour; it was not yet ten o'clock. Here was a chance for a woman-talk. Mrs. Vane told me almost immediately that she was quite alone, as her husband had gone up to Paris to see his mother. This lady, she added, had telegraphed to him that she needed his immediate presence. "Why," she said, "I know not. It is, I presume, one of her childish whims." I raised an interrogative eyebrow. "Oh," she went on, "I may as well tell you, dearest, that it has been even worse than I expected, yes, worse. She received me with cruel coldness, and all my efforts at conciliation have proved ineffectual. I thought the only people who could not be pardoned were the perfect ones; but it seems that even my imperfections do not commend me to my mother-in-law."

"Tell me about it," I said, comfortably settling my hand under my cheek. La Rochefoucauld was right; other people's troubles have their piquancy.

"There isn't much to tell. She is edgy and inelastic. She lives in a small, narrow round, and can see nothing beyond. She belongs to that large class of women, the whole framework of whose virtue seems to consist in unjust severity towards their own sex. To men they are always lenient, to women harsh and uncompromising." I nodded my head. "I know them," I said.

"What will you have? She is still regretting Alva Greene's ducats. She is a lady, that I must admit. Sometimes she makes me feel that I am not one. I must have made some terrible mistake. Perhaps I tried too hard to please her. You see I—I—love him so much!"

Ah, the touch of nature! I had her hand.

"It was such a foolish thing I can hardly speak of it, —the matter of a pearl pin,—and this with my tumult of spirit! Ah, she has none of that to repress!" The cry was genuine. "I went out and bought it for her; a poor little thing; but she suffers from cold, she wraps herself up. I thought it would have been useful to hold her shawl. I meant well." She paused; I pressed her fingers in eager sympathy, "I went there; it was the third time I saw her. I had it in my breast. I was actually trembling. She had been so icy, but not insolent, not actually insolent, and then——"

"Then?"

"Well, she just waived it aside. 'Keep it for yourself,' she said to me. 'I have no use for the thing.' And then—then she added, 'You had better not waste your husband's money on such follies.'"

"I thought you said she was a lady?"

"She is, in a way. When she says things like that it is in a low voice, and she is never vulgar. No, it is I who became vulgar."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing then, nothing until night, when Templeton came home. He had been out hunting. Then I just lay in wait for him——"

"And?"

"Ah!" she said, and her eyes gleamed with a sudden flame, "this is the awful part of it, I forgot myself. I gave him no chance—no chance—before he could speak,—he adores his mother—I criminated myself, made myself the most unforgivable offender."

"I don't understand." She spoke so quickly, with eager breath and dramatic intensity, that I rose from my reclining position. My heart was beating.

"Yes, yes, that is the misery. It has made the most dreadful trouble."

"Why, what?"

"I was in fury. I pounced on him. I denounced her."

"But what did you say?"

"He spoke of her invalidism. He was in good humor. He had had fine sport. He didn't get angry at her a bit, not a bit; but rather found fault with me for being sensitive. Then it was I cried out that dreadful thing. I said, 'No wonder she is ill. She lives on stimulants. There was but one excuse for her. She had taken too much wine.'"

"Ah!"

"You see you yourself are shocked."

"Not in the least, my dear; I should have beaten her!"

"Oh, yes, you are. It was terrible, for he made a rush for me, and he took me by the shoulder. Of course, he was not rough at first, until I had talked on and on and infuriated him ; and then he became as one blind, and he shook me and threw me from him, and gave me the lie, and I hurt my foot against a chair ; and when I cried he didn't seem to care,—he *wanted* to hurt me."

"Was it a lie?"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course! I knew not what I said."

"But if he loves you——?"

"Yes ; he loves me."

"Why, then, it is all forgiven!"

"No," she said ; "it is not forgiven.'

"By him?"

"No ; by me."

"You think he should always take your part?"

"No ; it is not that."

"It was his touching you roughly?"

"No, no ; I have pardoned that. I know what passionate pity means. He pities his mother because she is alone and old and ill,—or thinks that she is. But he should have let the stream have vent. There are characters like that ; they must speak or die. Then comes exhaustion, and all is over. After it I was relieved. I could have gone back to her, the poor lady, on my hands and knees, slaved for her, cared for her, served her ; but he wouldn't let me. Oh! he is hard, hard. He will scarcely let me approach her now."

"It isn't hardness," I said, decidedly ; "it is a lack of intelligence."

"Intelligence?"

"Exactly. That I could have told you.

She shook her head. "I always felt that he lacked perception, but this is so frequent in men. You think it is this, and not coldness of heart?"

"Yes."

"He says he hates scenes, and that I make them."

"Do you often?"

"Why, no; I am placid as a lake every day. But there has been one other,—one since we were married,—one big one,—oh, dreadful!"

"Tell it to me; it will comfort you."

"There isn't much comfort in it, but I will tell you about it. This time it was jealousy."

"Oh, nonsense! You must have imagined it."

"No, listen: I have an enormous hold on him. There was no present jealousy; this was about the past."

"Oh, my dear! if you propose to make yourself miserable about men's past, you had better go into a convent and become a *religieuse* at once."

"Why, wouldn't *you* worry about a man's past?" I squirmed; the subject was not pleasant. "I will tell you. And first, you know, jealousy is mere jealousy while it feeds on doubts, because it is doubt. When it becomes certainty it becomes anger. That is why the past has such a power,—we know its pictures to be real."

"Not always."

"This was real, at any rate—horrid!'

"I feel sure you exaggerate."

"I couldn't—not what I suffered—suffer still when I think of it."

"Don't tell me then."

"Yes, I will. You don't know, it may save me."

"Save you?"

"Yes; from more misery. It will be a safety-valve."

"Go on then."

"I was fussing over some papers of his in an old portfolio. It was there I found those letters."

"Dear me!"

"Yes, from her, that awful woman! Don't laugh. If you knew—you do know; you have seen her. You know her name. If she had only been pretty, or young, or anything!"

"I am not sure."

"No? Well, perhaps not; but it is knowing a person that is the worst. We know there has been a past, —I have had mine, God knows, and so he reminds me, sometimes. But when it is vague it is bearable. It is knowledge that kills. I had seen her in the world. I knew how she did up her hair; how she held her hands, walked, spoke; how she would behave under certain conditions. I had been close to her over and over,—talked to her. I knew the shape of her ears. That is why one would be more miserable if it were a friend than a stranger that they had loved or cared about. Imagination has its limits. When you give it food it runs riot. Mine did. How could he? If you knew! She has a long nose . . . she is really . . . ancient."

"And the letters?"

"Wild love-letters from her to him. I read them."

"Was he angry?"

"Oh, not at that. Any woman would have read them. Why, there they were disgracefully evident, indecently get-at-able! He thought them destroyed."

"How shocking! She must, indeed, be shameless," I said, although unable to conceal a smile.

"You may say it."

"Well, but it is all over?"

"Oh, yes, seven years ago."

"Ah, but then——"

"She is still alive!"

"Where is the creature?"

"Travelling!" this with a tragic stress. "Gone to Lapland, I hear, on an expedition."

"Let us hope the sea-lions will devour her!"

"They couldn't digest her. She's plain, my dear, there is no doubt of that, and ill-shapen. But she has a good skin,—although her nose is so pronounced."

"Yes."

"You admire her skin, then?"

"No, dear, I said 'yes' about the nose."

"All this would not have mattered if I had not made the most awful fuss."

"I suppose fuss is hardly the word."

"Hardly. I just died."

"And made a row?"

"I ranted all night. I insulted him."

"How did he take it?"

"Mildly at first, as he always does, and at last furious."

"He did not touch you?"

"Oh, no! never—never—never but that once about his mother. He is the soul of gentleness."

"Don't you think, then, that you do try him, that you are too exacting, that you ought to control yourself?"

"Ah!" she said, pushing the cushion at my feet on which she sat closer to my knee, and resting her chin upon her palm, looking up into my eyes: "That is just what I wanted to tell you; that is the sum of all that I am confiding to you. I am controlling myself. I am controlling myself, and it isn't a success. Olga,

you know how I love, love, love and worship him! I have made a god of him. He is not my husband, but my lover, my idol. Oh, I was so lonely and so forlorn when he took pity on me! Oh, my poor hungry heart! One must have waited—suffered to know what his love meant for me. He will never know how I have loved him."

"Loved! Do you speak in the past tense?" I felt suddenly as if I was commonplace; that there was not enough storm in me to understand her nature.

She stirred uneasily: "Why do you imagine I love him less?"

"Who can say?"

"What makes you think I should love him less?" she persisted, with a note of insistent anxiety in her tone.

"I cannot tell—your own word."

"Oh!" she cried, suddenly, springing to her feet. "You have touched that terror, you have told the truth—the truth: I shall love him less if I control myself, if I stifle it all, keep it all in. Why, only last week there was a passing misunderstanding; all might have been explained. But I feared my own impulse, I feared a 'scene,' as he calls it. I let it pass. I held my peace. But every time—every time that I do, there is something seems to snap within me—to loosen. I feel that I am drifting away from him, to indifference, to—to—despair. I wake in the night, the cold drops upon my forehead. I have dreamed that I wanted to speak and could not." Her words and manner impressed me strongly.

"Why don't you explain all this to him, make a clean breast of your peculiar nature, give him its key? How long is it since you have held your peace, avoided scenes, as you say, and kept your own counsel?"

"Several months."

"And you are less happy?"

"I was in heaven when I felt free with him,—when the scene was over; and they were so rare, so very rare. Don't imagine that we haven't lived in peace together. It was peace nearly always. But now that I keep something back, always, always, he doesn't get all of me, as he used. And the most dreadful thing is he doesn't seem to see it, and I am miserable."

"And you tell me he is better pleased, more content?"

"Apparently. Only the other day he took my hand, and after admiring it (he likes my hands), he complimented me on my increased tact. He said, 'You are learning to understand me, to make me the existence I desire. I am so grateful, I do so detest quarrels!' and do you know, at that moment when I looked at him, I never liked or loved him less!"

"What did you say?"

She sank down again upon the cushion at my feet, with a discouraged gesture, and her voice fell to a dispirited monotone. "What was there to say? I expressed gratitude, and told him I was glad he was so content."

Before we parted, she made me promise I would on no account speak to him. "He would imagine," she said, "that I had complained, and oh, he is all that I have and want!" When I went to my room my heart felt oppressed. I told myself that here were two beings drifting apart, tossed and perhaps wrecked forever through a nervous idiosyncrasy of the one, a trick of temper or of health, and a wilful folly and blindness of the other. I decided, notwithstanding my promise, that if I had the opportunity I would say a word to

her husband, guardedly of course, and diplomatically. I also decided that life was quite too impracticable, except possibly to peasant women who have no time for introspection,—only enough to carry their fagots, stir their soup-pots, and bear their little ones.

VI.

LIFE seemed, however, less impossible on the following morning. It was a bright, pleasant day, and my hostess came down to meet me, looking youthful in her white costume, and with cheeks like ripening peaches. After breakfast we took a short drive ; a band of music lured us to the promenade, where we deserted our low phaeton, and wandered under the trees, to join a group of friends. Mr. Atherton detached himself from among them and came forward with his alert, angular, gentlemanly movement, to join us. One of his young daughters' eyes followed his retiring figure from a neighboring kiosk with an air of evident relief. There was a young man with her, and the measure of cordiality of her smile seemed to change in a perfectly distinct ratio with the number of steps her father took.

"I wish Mr. Atherton had a dissipated son," I said, watching Miss Atherton with keen amusement.

"And why, pray?"

"To make him appreciate his good little girls. Depend upon it, dissipated sons have their uses ; they are a discipline to their parents. Parents are unreasonable."

"Yes. Do you remember the Nordhoffs?"

"Why?"

"How kindly they received the gardener's daughter their second son married?"

"How was that, with all their pride?"

"Why, the eldest, you see, had married an adventuress."

"Ah!"

Mr. Atherton was at this time paying assiduous court to a young married lady of irreproachable ancestry, position, and morals. She had deserted Newport for six weeks, and had come here, accompanied by her husband and little son, to take mud-baths for her complexion. He had followed her. It was to be supposed that she was now steeping herself, since Mr. Atherton had a moment to give to us.

This lady was celebrated for extreme discretion in discouraging the pursuit of over-warm adorers, without making enemies of them. The women said it was her laugh. Now, there are all kinds of laughter: there is the laugh that is challenging, there is the laugh that is promising; but Mrs. Remington's was pointed by no challenge and charged with no promise; it was simply disarming. A certain gentleman of American birth, but foreign breeding, had been frowned down by the young women because of too much boldness of manner. This they decried in the heated conclave of their drawing-rooms, and yet inconsequently countenanced by asking the culprit to dine on the following day. He was once, it was said, punished by a peal of this searching, soul-cleansing, purifying laughter, and went forth a wiser, if a sadder, man.

Mr. Atherton's present flirtation was a fortunate source of conversation for the perambulant American on this summer's morning.

"I cannot see the fun of it," said a young widow, who seemed annoyed that so eligible a *parti* should waste his forces on an already mortgaged person.

"They sit together for hours; I often wonder what they find to talk about."

"Oh, my dear, nothing very reprehensible, I will wager," said I.

"Reprehensible!" She sunk her eyes and puckered a shocked lip.

"Well, what?"

"Mrs. Remington is a pink of propriety, as well as of elegance; faultless in conduct as in dress."

"I saw her once in a cab with Atherton, crossing the Rond Point," said Alva Greene, from under her *écru* lace parasol. "Was that good taste? I cannot see why a married woman who flirts finds such inconceivable delight in abandoning her sumptuous equipage to drive about in dirty cabs with strange gentlemen!"

"What will you have? It is a morbid appetite," said Singleton Ackley, who had just taken a seat beside us. "The cab, mesdames," he went on, "is the modern gondola——"

"And, therefore, a fit trysting-place for lovers?" I asked.

"It seems to play its part even with crown princes and royal personages," he answered, smiling.

"Therefore—amen!"

"Every one is thirsting for joys that life does not hold," sighed the widow.

"Look at Mrs. Remington's bonnet," said Miss Greene. "There is a joy that life does hold." The lady in question had loomed on the promenade.

"She has a new one every hour; one cannot cope with her."

"Extravagance makes trade," said Singleton Ackley, lighting his cigarette; "it is only a form of benevolence."

"The men adore her."

"She is not too clever," said Singleton: "this is the reason. Intellectual women are frightful bores."

"Why?"

"They expect to be listened to."

"What were women made for if not to be listened to?"

"A woman ought to be handsome and well groomed."

"It costs such a lot," said the widow, sighing.

"Of course, it costs a lot," said I; "and so the ingenuous blue-grass cousin finds out when she wanders eastward, imagining that two new gowns will solve the problem."

"One must be able to discard the failures, and out of ten gowns four or six are always failures," said Miss Greene, decidedly.

"Yes," said the widow, "and there are the shoes, and the boots, and the stockings, and the *lingeries;* the laces and the furs, the sachets and the parasols; the soaps and creams; the violet-scented hair-washes; the dainty, delicate drop upon the handkerchief; the perfumed bath, the nail-powders. Why, a smart woman has to spend hours among all these things, and the innocent suppose that it is all child's play, and no expense!"

"I would like to see women always splendid, like the Roman empresses," said an impecunious youth with a thin moustache; "no tailor-made woman for me. I like satins, velvets, jewels."

"Half the women in the world are slatterns," said Mr. Ackley. "They make a grave mistake."

"Surely you do not think low physical attraction the only one!"

"It is very strong—the charm of an exquisite personality, physical neatness, and sweetness. Depend upon it, Cleopatra's little hand smelt good."

"Tolstoï says it is all a snare," said Alva Greene.

"Physical perfection," said Mr. Ackley, "haunts the mind like melodious music and the odor of summer roses. The senses have their memory."

"After all, it is temperament that attracts," said Mrs. Vane; "otherwise women are but like water-flowers, cold to the touch and scentless."

"Ah, well," said Mr. Ackley, "there is room on the earth even for the scentless ones, it seems. Fortunately, variety is everything—everything. Why expect the camellia to be the water-lily, or the sweet-pea the geranium? No flower and no person can give us every attribute. Look at it in literature. 'She has written a pretty book,' one says, 'but why a novel, when it might have been an essay? why a song, instead of a dirge? why a sonnet? why not a madrigal?' I grow so sick of this 'Why, why, why?' How half-witted is the world! Let everybody be himself. Give of your best, that is all I ask. People say, 'She gives good dinners, but is not a loyal friend.' I say, 'Eat her dinner then and lay no claim on her loyalty.' One man is faithful, another sets an excellent table. There is room for both. Society is nothing but a stepping-stone; why ask of it religious graces and transcendent virtues? The earth is a very good place. I don't want springs; I am content with taps. I do not expect to stand on heights, with immensity above me and eagles at my feet. I like comfort, and this place suits me very well."

And here Templeton Vane drove to the edge of the grass, in his T-cart, threw the reins to his groom, and

ran up across the grass. He had just arrived from the train. He stopped and kissed his wife's hand. She flushed with a furious pleasure at his unexpected return.

"I telegraphed an hour ago to James to meet me," he said. "I could not keep away from you any longer, dearest," I heard him whisper to her.

It was with intention that I said a word to him later, when we returned to the villa. He wandered down across his flower-beds, to where I sat under the plantain tree, and he was the first to speak of his married life. "I am very happy," he said.

"Ah?"

"Yes; very much more than at first. Madeline is beginning to understand me better."

"Did she not at first?" I asked, secretly impatient.

"The dear girl was inclined to make a fuss about things. Do you know, Mrs. Leigh, I often think it is your influence that has been so admirable."

"My influence!"

"Yes; you are a woman of the world, a woman of so much wisdom. Madeline had very little. It was the only defect of an otherwise most lovable character."

"You always said she was lovable."

"And I was right—ahem! More so now than ever, that I have . . . er . . . trained her, as it were, to suit me."

"She suits you then, now? She understands you?"

"Yes, lately, perfectly."

"And you," I said, turning round and fixing his amiable, clear eye with my own, sharply. "And you? Do you suit her? Do you understand her?"

He shifted his position and opened his mouth; his

jaw fell and he remained speechless. "Tell me!" I leaned forward clasping my hands. He had a puzzled line between the roots of his hair and his shapely nose. "Why do you ask such an odd question?" he said to me after a short pause.

"Oh, idle curiosity, no more. It cannot be true, can it, that between two hearts that have won each other, there is sometimes a wide chasm that nothing can bridge?" I felt indignant with the man and provoked at the fetters of my promise to Mrs. Vane. I rose. He sprang to his feet and seized one of my hands. "Why do you say this to me?" he asked, frowning.

"If you are an artist," I answered him, "who has undertaken to play on a difficult instrument, be sure beforehand that you are strong and skilful. Nothing is so pitiable in that line, my dear friend, as a poor performance. If you are a man of action, who has sworn to vanquish at all costs, why *do not fail*, like Napoleon at Waterloo. And now I am going in to rest." I felt that I had been enigmatic; but what could one say to a man so sunk in the contemplation of his own sagacity?

On the following day I left them standing side by side upon their porch, as they waved their adieux to me. She clung to me a little at parting, and she whispered a word in my ear with a blush. I had suspected her secret, and kissed her tenderly, not, however, without a sudden unaccountable anxiety in my soul. There was a wistful look in her eyes and a tear, as I drove away. I saw her turn and look up appealingly at her husband, putting out her hand towards him, as if seeking his to clasp. But he was giving an order to a servant, who was coming up the pathway, and he did not

notice her gesture. His back was half turned to me, and his own hands were thrust into the pockets of his short, admirably-fitting morning-coat. He drew it forward thus over his comfortable hips, clearly defining the lines of his fine, stoutish figure. He looked a perfectly self-satisfied human being.

VII.

We had a quiet sea and azure heavens all the way across the waters. A commercial traveller who had squared himself into his camp-stool, on the first morning, with a groan and a "whatever way you look at it, it's a weary ride!" had taken heart of grace. He smoked his pipe assiduously, and played at nine-pins with the betting men who infested the deck of an afternoon, as if he, on the whole, rather enjoyed the dreaded tedium, which meant to his ceaseless activity seven days of rest. His heavy laugh came ever and anon, wafted across the gaping red mouths of the ventilators, whose greasy breath puffed out above me where I crouched with sea-sick smiles. I used to watch these distant revels, in which my husband occasionally took a dignified part. When weary of this I chatted with Dr. Elsworth. He was a man whom I knew slightly in New York, but rarely met there. He was an eccentric person of about fifty, reputed to be a scholar and a student. He had served in the army during the war, and had kept the habit of displaying his bulky form in a military cloak; and of covering his locks with a wide sombrero, which he seemed to imagine the casque of a war-god. Shy, retiring, with the reticence which passes for modesty, he was, in fact, intensely vain. He longed for appreciation, and begged for it on all

occasions. He was handsome, with a broad, ungraceful comeliness. He had a mild eye, kindly lips, a large, benevolent, guileless brow. Without one spark of natural genius or even of spontaneous talent, he had risen to a sort of unproductive eminence, through an appalling devotion to detail and to study. Just now he had a fine medical frenzy upon him. Although he had graduated in his youth an M.D., he had never practised. He had lately attended a convention of medical men in Germany. He was full of their ideas and his own, and we talked one day about the theories of a celebrated physician, an alienist, who had lately delivered a brilliant course of lectures. We were discussing the fact, so often stated, that every one is more or less insane.

"Professor Lay," said the doctor in his monotone, "makes a physiological classification. His principle is that an order of morbid phenomena in insanity is identical with that of health phenomena modified. The ancients thought and wrote much on these subjects. Aretæus recognized mania and dementia. Dr. Arnold classifies ideal, notional, and pathetic insanity. Esquirol, the pupil of Pinel, tells us that monomania is the disorder of the faculties limited to one of a small number of objects, the predominance of a gay expansiveness being one form, while the most common is grandiose monomania."

While he spoke I rebuked my husband for a lack of indignation at the carelessness and want of neatness of one of the deck-stewards, and finding it impossible to excite his wrath, I flung at him my usual accusation, "You are phlegmatic!"

"Hold! hold! my dear lady," said Dr. Elsworth. "Nobody really is phlegmatic."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Exactly this: one person screams and cries out, and is relieved. The other holds his peace and gets neurosis."

"Why, what an odd idea!"

"Depend upon it, there is something in it. I have been studying these theories."

As he droned on, somehow my thoughts reverted to Mrs. Vane. He was still talking upon these matters, when the stars came out in the black-blue heights of the serene dome over our heads. I wondered if I myself had not done injustice to some of the silent sufferers about me, to my good husband, for instance, who was always tranquil as a god. But one hates to be pinned to acknowledge one has been wrong,—to make any concessions. Right or wrong, one does like to stick to one's convictions. I still felt inclined to believe that a heart that could not overflow in speech or action was too feeble for emotion.

VIII.

THE next time that I heard of Madeline it was at a dinner party. I had gone rather unwillingly to this banquet. When we returned to the drawing-room after dinner I found myself in a group of young women not especially pleasing or congenial to me. One of them, indeed, I knew but slightly, and perhaps on this account admired. I might have found her sufficiently interesting to detain in conversation, had she not almost instantly withdrawn from the rest of us, to look at a case of miniatures which stood at the farther end of the apartment. She was ostensibly examining these portraits, which dainty trifles were exhibited in a wide ormolu cabinet; but I think that we probably bored her.

We were all married women except one maiden of thirty-two summers, who was herself shortly to enter into the coveted privileges of the madame. She had been extremely handsome, and still dressed and posed for a beauty; but it was said of her beauty that a number of vicissitudes of the heart had left scars upon it. I have already mentioned her name: it was Alva Greene.

She was recounting to a somewhat restive listener the culminating experience of her lot, and the perfections of the happy suitor she was about to bless. "There is no question about it," she was saying,—"and you know if I am credulous—he simply never looked at another woman."

"Really?" The lady she addressed, a sharp-eyed, thin-lipped brunette, glanced at her with that profound distrust with which one woman views the passion that another inspires.

"Never!" (this aggressively.) "It gives one such security, such peace." Miss Greene thought the best defence was to be herself the attacking party.

"I have heard he was devoted to his first wife," said the brunette, "which is always an excellent guarantee of the future."

There was a moment's painful silence. "Devoted is a mere word," said Miss Greene, irritably. "Kind, of course, he was. He is the soul of honor and gentlemanliness. She was a puny, fretful invalid. He had her looked after, of course."

"Oh!"

The ripe maiden blushed and smiled coyly. "But when he saw me,—it was at the Greshams dance, you know, last year——"

"I remember it."

"It was a thunderbolt—instantaneous. He never had felt love before."

"Fancy!" The ejaculation savored of a slight irony. Surely such confidence deserved a better faith.

"His has been a life singularly free from . . . I mean exemplary in every respect. No women at all,—no complications of that sort. First, his career, and then exercise. It is wonderful, with such an intellect, his love for manly sports."

"How old is he?" asked the other lady, abruptly, stirring nervously in her chair, and propping up her long chin upon a tanned Suède hand.

"Forty-nine."

"Only that?"

"Why? doesn't he look much younger? Everybody says so."

"He varies."

"Ah, he is true,—true and pure."

"Oh, my dear! Of course, one's lover is all these things, always—like one's mother," and the lady laughed rather unpleasantly.

"Do you think me easily duped?" asked the *fiancée*, in an offended whisper.

"My dear, why do you ask me such a quaint question?"

"You seem to think . . . "

"I should suppose, being so beloved, you would not care what people thought. I should be quite indifferent if I had the luck to inspire such sentiments."

"Of course, you understand that a woman of my charm and accustomed to such a lot of attention would refuse to put up with another woman's leavings."

"Why, of course, my dear! Only you know people are so nasty, they never will think or say what we want them to."

The virgin raised her eyes and looked at her friend with a gleam of resentment. "They may say what they like. I never saw such mad devotion. His pursuit was simply terrific, although, of course, always full of respect and even of formality," she added, apologetically.

"I should think you would have been frightened."

"Well, almost, at first; but now, of course, he is calmer:" this with another coy shiver.

"Yes, naturally; the approach of marriage is always a sedative."

"I suppose persons judge from their own experience." Resentment is accumulative.

"My own experience tells me that it is effectively calming."

"That depends on how one begins. Now I do not intend to make a mess of my husband's life."

"Of course not; you have had such a nice long time to make all your plans. *I* was married extremely young." This was too much, and the bride-elect rose hastily and joined me and a doll-like little lady who was recounting the bewildering fascinations of her first-born infant. "He has such a fat little leg—you can't imagine! and he crows so, and shuts up one eye. He is the very image of Theodore,—just his father's nose. Don't you remember that dent between the nostrils? Isn't it odd that children should resemble their father? It is inconceivable. I asked the doctor about it. He says there is some scientific reason. He explained it as best he could; it was most instructive. He is exactly like his father, too, in character, in everything, the

same strong will and tenacity of purpose, with self-respect, ambition, dignity."

"How old is he?" I asked, quoting the question which had lately been put on the other side of the lamp-shade, across the palm-tree.

"Eight weeks."

"And all these traits already developed! Why, he must indeed be a marvel of precocity!"

"Yes. Crumpet, the English nurse, says it is an unusual case; she never saw anything like it before."

I commended Crumpet's sagacity and insight.

"She is excellent, and so cheery, and likes the place. We took her from Lady de Horton. Lady de Horton's baby was called James John De Courcy Peveril of the Peak Drummond."

"Poor baby!"

"He was never allowed cow's milk, although his mother . . . "

I had kept one ear upon the dialogue across the lamp, and now, seeing the betrothed making a double-quick advance in my direction on the points of her high-heeled satin shoes, I took refuge behind a screen, and sank on a sofa, beside a lady to whom I had been presented by our hostess on my arrival. The latter had since informed me, in a voice tinged with acute suffering, that this . . . person . . . was the widow of "dear Charlie Lomax, you know, who was killed at Snake's Creek, in an Indian engagement," and that the said Mrs. Lomax was inconveniently in town from Snakeville, Oregon, and had been crushed in at this dinner, at the last moment, and under protest. "He married her out there, you know," she added, as she looked across at her relative, with a tormented eye. "Would you mind saying just a little tiny word to her,

by and by? She doesn't know a soul, and the women are so horrid to strangers!" She stopped to take breath, and I noticed that she had a good deal more to say, but that, after an instant's reflection, she concluded it was not well-bred to criticise a guest. She had gracefully glided on. I good-naturedly promised to devote myself, after dinner, to the Snakeville widow, and now proceeded to win my spurs. I approached the fair unknown with a somewhat patronizing manner, and laudable purpose of affability, but she did not meet my advances with the embarrassed delight which my civilities should have commanded.

"It's awfully hot in this parlor!" was her first greeting, in a tone in which there lurked a certain combative quality. I offered her my fan. "Thanks; I've got one myself." She had early in the evening attracted my attention by her extreme prettiness, the youthfulness of her appearance, and the peculiarities of her costume. It is needless to say that all the other women were in full dress, and some of them even in diaphanous ball-gowns, crowned with flowers, intending to be driven straight from the dinner to an early dance, without change of raiment. But Mrs. Lomax was not in a ball-gown. It would have been indeed difficult to determine for what peculiar function her accoutrement had been constructed. She had on a species of loose shirt or blouse, which met a skirt fulled at the hips with a wisp of gold. It was as shapeless as a domino, or the petticoat of a dancing dervish. It was made of some flimsy summer fabric, and was of a faint green color. As she moved, one had an uncomfortable sensation that she had possibly forgotten to put on her underclothes, and one hoped the draught from the door would not convert this half-acknowledged fear into certainty. The shirt,

which reached her creamy throat, was fastened by a bit of white lace, and a large round seed-pearl brooch.

Her hair, profuse and golden, was cut short, and curled all over her head. It stood straight out like a halo or arch, from one small ear to the other, thus framing her high, pale forehead. It was generously decked with a scattering of seed-pearls. On her feet she wore light-green stockings and black velvet slippers with large buckles. The tender tone of her complexion, which was of a soft ivory tint, was rudely dispelled by a color on each cheek-bone, so distinctly unnatural that one felt thankful the shaded lamps blended the effect with merciful discretion. But the scarlet curves of her moist young lips were genuine. She wore very tight lavender seamless gloves, not entirely drawn on at the ends of the fingers, and from a ring and chain on her little finger there depended a lace pocket-handkerchief, trimmed at its edge with a wide lace flounce.

Notwithstanding her remarkable outfit, and in spite of it, she was the handsomest person present. Her profile had the regularity of a carved cameo. Her wide, deep eyes, with their curled lashes, were singularly expressive. Her face offered the mixture of types represented by Greek art and the more piquant modernity of the French masters. Her eyes, at present, were filled with infinite disdain. I asked her, to make conversation, if she had seen our host's collection of miniatures.

She bit her lip. "I looked at them for a while, before dinner," she said. "They are awful. I can do better than that myself."

"Have you studied art abroad?"

"Bless me, yes! I took three years in an atelier in

Paris, first on still-life, then from the nude. I can do very well in oils, and those little heads, too."

"Have you travelled much?" I asked, suavely.

"Oh, yes. I have been everywhere; I went around the world with my brother; he was engineering. Why, it was in Russia I met the colonel." I presumed the "colonel" was her dead lord. "Yes," she went on, "we got engaged at Tsarkoe Sélo, in the grotto they call Caprice."

This was unusual, romantic, and I said so.

"Ah," she sighed, "yes! It was romantic. I've had a lot of that in my life. When you've travelled round and then been on the plains and at army-posts, and hunting buffaloes, a place like New York seems awfully tame. I kind of pity you all here!"

I agreed that we were, in fact, very tame,—chimney sparrows, house-flies, tepid and insignificant, hopping about hopelessly in search of entertainment.

"I've led a queer life," she went on, "and had a lot of trouble; but it was not dull a bit. What a horrid smell those lamps make!" she added, widening the delicate nostrils of her perfect nose.

"We think these French things an improvement on gas; but I see one is turned up too high."

"We only use the electric in Snakeville; we consider these oils offensive. But, then, the residences there are so large."

Residences! I knew Snakeville. I saw it. I knew that no one got up there, and no one went to bed; but that every one "rose," and every one "retired," and, in fact, that the most trifling detail of life was enacted with august and solemn elegance. No one lived in Snakeville; people "resided." There were no houses, but "palatial residences."

"This is a charming drawing-room—don't you think so?" I said, lowering my voice, lest our hostess should overhear our criticisms. "Don't you find this Louis Seize room admirably carried out?"

"It seems mighty small to me," said Mrs. Lomax; "why Senator Packer's is a regular castle, all white marble and an onyx staircase, with a gold railing to it. They have got a gallery a hundred feet long, with the most splendid pictures,—Meissoniers and Gérômes and all that. His wife, Mrs. Packer, is a very fine woman; did you ever chance to meet her? She's very dressy. I happened to call on her once when she was retiring. She had me called to her room. She had on a brocade night-gown covered with crystal drops; it was made in Paris. Did you ever meet her?" she repeated.

I had never met Mrs. Packer, and so I informed her, adding that the Snakeville ladies must indeed be very superb if they went to bed encrusted with crystals. Whether she thought my remark impertinent, I cannot tell; but she flushed and frowned.

"When we retire to our bedchambers," she answered, "we are not in the habit of receiving company; but Mrs. Packer is always very dressy, whether she is at parties or on the street. I have seen nothing here that came up to her," and her regard rested with ill-disguised contempt upon Miss Greene's severe satin.

My amiable intentions of condescension having been rudely quelled, and finding myself strangely uncomfortable and ill at ease, I ventured timidly to inquire if she considered Miss Greene handsome.

"No," said Mrs. Lomax, shaking her yellow curls; "at least, she wouldn't pass for such out in Oregon. I reckon out there she wouldn't get much attention, not at her age. She's fady-looking, but I think all the

New York women look that way,—sort of frayed out." I involuntarily cast a furtive glance at myself in a neighboring mirror; she was right; we were "frayed out;" I felt it coming on like a fit of ague.

"And what do you think of our men? Do they please you better?" I asked.

Her scarlet cheek turned quickly to my question. "I think they are dreadfully dumb—all those I have met, at least."

"Are the gentlemen in Snakeville so eloquent?"

She laughed; yes, she was very lovely. "They know a handsome woman when they see her, and how to make her realize it," she answered. "That is something more than the men here seem to fathom."

"They tell her so?"

"Well, they are not backward."

"I am sure, then, you must have had many such declarations."

"Oh, my share, when I was a girl! I have only begun to go out again lately, since I took off my black for the colonel."

"Has any one heard anything more about Mrs. Vane?" a voice spoke on the other side of the screen.

"Why?" asked I, emerging startled, "what is there to hear about Mrs. Vane?"

"Why, don't you know?" said the others in chorus; "we thought you were her intimate friend." I had not heard and told them so.

"Well," said the first speaker, in a distrait tone, one eye on the door, from which shortly would emerge a pair of broad shoulders she was supposed to be waiting for, "her baby was born too soon, and she has gone mad."

"Mad?" I started, shaken to the heart.

"Well, no, not exactly that, but a sort of melancholy. They cannot rouse her."

"I heard it was monomania."

"Why, what?"

"That she fancies she must not tell something that is on her mind, I know not what. Lillie Lawton saw her—says it is so sad."

"It was a miserable match for him," said Alva Greene; "she had not a sou. His mother tried to break it up, but he would not listen. There were stories about her before, were there not?"

"Oh, lots of them! Her husband drank."

"Do you call that a story about her?"

"You can't tell; she may have driven him to it."

"But that is only a surmise."

"His mother did not wish him to marry one of those women about whom there are . . . surmises."

"Naturally. Wasn't there some story about a man in love with her?"

"Since when is it a crime for a woman to have a man in love with her?"

"My dear, you are not aware that at that time she was a married woman?" said Miss Greene.

"Pshaw! If she was fascinating, she couldn't help herself!"

"She was fascinating, to men."

"Lillie Lawton says it's quite shocking, she looks so dreadfully, and never will speak, never opens her lips. He is in despair,—sits all day outside her door, listening, listening. The most awful thing is . . . "

"Outside her door?"

"Yes. She has taken a violent dislike to him, and shrinks from him as if she feared him."

"How lamentable, when he broke his mother's heart to marry her, and heaped everything upon her!"

"But wasn't she always rather queer?"

"I don't know; she was awfully attractive,—yes, queer, I think; no doubt eccentric. She posed for a *femme incomprise.*"

"Perhaps she was one," said a quiet voice. It was that of the lady whom I admired, and who had sat apart over the miniatures.

And I, who loved Madeline, rose quickly and hurried towards her, lest the others should see my tears.

The Moujik

OUT of the dusk they stepped together,—out of the dimness of smoking incense and swinging lamps, of grim ikons and white-robed choristers, of chanting priests and bowed worshippers. They were the nearer to each other because they were both strangers in that far land of snow and ice whose splendor and coldness had shot its mystic chill into their hearts. Together, I say, they came out of the deep, warm cathedral into the pallid glow of the winter's evening, into the vagueness of the snowy street, into the lonely stillness of the deserted square; and those strange anthems of an immortal melancholy seemed to pursue their hurrying, belated feet. Yet her eyes were full of sunshine as she swayed like a shadowy lily, tall and elegant in her rich furs, against the western light.

Under the sleeping Neva sighed the tides, and the birds calling to each other were fleeing fast. She smiled, but he was grave, and they spoke of many things together. He taught her of this curious nation, with its poverty and its riches, its ignorance and its insight, and of that superstitious rite whose hush was still upon them. "It is a sublime caprice," he said.

Just then, passing from pavement to pavement, a

plaint reached them, a child's plaint, loud and passionate, borne on the wind-gust that brushed them with its wing. They looked up. Leaning against the railing, where the white drifts had massed themselves in waves of a strange loveliness, stood a little boy. He was weeping bitterly, wringing his hands, filling earth and air with his distress. Swiftly they moved to where he stood. By his side lay a broken image, a small, white, plaster thing, such as Italian venders carry on their heads and sell in the thoroughfares of great cities. She stooped and spoke to him :

"So you have broken it, my little lad? What was it worth?" and her companion began to unbutton his military coat, fumbling in his breast for his pocket-book.

"*Dvar rublê*," sobbed the child.

He was a dirty little moujik, with a round face roughed by the weather. His eyes gleamed large and dark under his greasy old fur cap. His miserable touloupe was caught about his strong young loins by a wisp of hemp rope.

In a moment the sum he named, with a generous surplus, was pushed into one of his icy hands. Then instantly, with a piercing cry of joy which rent the twilight mists, the little fellow fell on the snow at their feet. He lay face downward, and three times his head rose and fell.

"What has happened to him?" said the lady, frightened.

But in a moment she had seen. His lips were moving; he was beating his hands upon his heart and crossing himself with vehemence. When he sprang once more to his feet he was still praying,—nay, giving his thanks to Heaven ; there was a rapt look on his face. To his benefactor he accorded only one timid upward glance

of gratitude. Then, gathering his poor garments about him, he ran away quickly and disappeared in the falling gloom.

"Ah," said the lady, "my friend, where shall we find again, you and I, the beautiful faith of this child soul?"

"If it be folly, it is a divine one," said her companion.

She remained silent, and they walked onward, saying no more words. But upon her eyelashes a tear had frozen.

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